

AUTHENTIC SCIENCE FICTION

THE MOON IS HEAVEN

AUTHENTIC *Science* FICTION

The **MOON
IS HEAVEN**

By H. J. Campbell

1/6

MONTHLY
No. 16



● **Authentic**
SCIENCE FICTION

A full-length novel

THE MOON IS HEAVEN

by

H. J. CAMPBELL

16

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projectiles

COMPLAINT

I think your stories are all very good and I like the *Old Growler* series. I like H. A. Campbell's stories, but I have one complaint: he spoils it by using "you did this" and "you did that." Personally, it bores me. I like all your authors, especially Roy Sheldon and his characters Spoor and Manners, and the way he leaves one of them in a precarious position at the end of a chapter and goes on to the other, leaving you in suspense.

R. PRIOR (Bogart Engle)

★

SUMMARY

The International Science Fiction Club has recently been reviewing your books and here is a summary of its opinions (Membership of our Club is open to anyone over 14 and under 30 who sends his or her name and age to this address for details.)

Summary. No. 1 quality 61%. No. 2 quality 94%. No. 3 quality 10%. No. 4 quality 49%. No. 5 quality 31%. No. 6 quality 18%. No. 7 (We did not read this. We are sick of Roy Sheldon.) No. 8 38%. No. 9 68%. No. 10

52%. No. 11 70%. No. 12 34%.

P. B. HAMILTON
(Lamar)

Thank you for a very useful letter, Peter. We wish your Club every success and hope that you will send us other summaries from time to time. We know from letters that we have several readers in your area; we hope they join.

★

QUERIES

Is there an Earth Satellite Vehicle Programme in work? When can we expect the first space flight? What of the atomic reactors being experimented with in the States?

S.-J.A. (Chadderton)

America has been working on a Satellite Vehicle Programme for some time; it is almost certain that the Russians are doing the same thing, and of course, our own British experts have been dealing with the question. The American atomic reactors are being used to obtain electrical power from turbines for ordinary factory use and for marine propulsion. The first space flight (manned) will probably take place within the next ten years, in our opinion.

MEMORY

In *The Last Marathon* a mutant is put away at the age of two. After twenty-four years he is set free. He catches a glimpse of a city and immediately recognizes it as London. He must have had a remarkable memory.

DEREK KEATES
(Highway, N.S.)

Come now, he had more than a glimpse. He flew over it in a couple. Besides, as it says on page 18, he knew it was London because he could see the great Security building not far distant. Another thing is that the whole point of the story is that the mutant had a remarkable memory!

★

MORE MACARTNEY

Have just finished *The Yarn to Galileo* and now I want more Macartney, but it hasn't quite got hot yet; you have never equalled *Every Atom*. You would have beaten it easily with *The Last Marathon*, this was a better story in many ways—but that awful style. . . .

R. POTTER (Lancaster)

★

COVERS

It seems you do take notice of your readers' views after all! From No. 9 your covers have been first rate—well, perhaps not first, but pretty good anyway. You can have the satisfaction of knowing that there

are only two American magazines that run better covers than yours. Keep it, and get even better if you can.

P. F. WILSON (Bedford)

We certainly do take notice of our readers' letters. The main points of every one of them are taken out and filed together, so that we can see at a glance what your views are to the various aspects of our magazine. Thanks for the compliments about our covers.

★

ALL DEPENDS

I have been having an argument with some friends. Perhaps you could settle it for us, even if it does seem elementary. How long would it take to get to Venus?

R. J. SLOANE (Sheff)

All depends on how fast you are travelling! Seriously, the journey would only 143 days if you used the most economical route, i.e., the one requiring the least fuel. In this you just need fuel for take-off and landing, the greater part of the journey being covered on our jets cruising between the orbits. That is the route that will be used first. When better rockets become available, and better fuels, it may be possible to travel in a more or less straight line between the planets. This will make the journey much shorter, but it will have to be done under power—and an awful lot of power at that. And if we ever attain the velocity of light, we could get there in three and three-quarter minutes!

Editorial

high tide

The tide of Science fiction is coming in again. Somehow or other—maybe it's something to do with the moon!—people are getting space-conscious. They do that every now and again, you know. Then the majority of them turn over and go to sleep again.

But here's the point: at each swing of the pendulum, that majority gets less and less. So that devotees of SF are joined at intervals by a flood of floaters that comes to stay.

We get the impression here by increased demand that goes on demanding. It's interesting to find people popping up all over the country and asking for ASF. Sometimes they ask only once and we never hear of them again.

But just lately there has been a concerted uprush of people who are still with us—many of them having taken out two and three year subscriptions.

Now, we are not so conceited as to think that ASF does this all by itself! There are many factors that make people turn to SF. But it is good news, because the more subscriptions we get, the solidier is our working foundation. If things go on like this, there'll be a number of improvements coming up. By the way have you taken out a sub?

★

Many SFers are walking around with black boards on

their arms. We almost feel like doing the same. GALAXY is dead.

That was a fine magazine with fine stories and a fine future. We know the circumstances under which it died and we can assure all fans who do not already know it, that GALAXY did not die because of lack of sales. Even now it may be resurrected.

•

It is time to see national magazines with large circulation running space features—even if some of them are rather inaccurate! Things like this and the recent SF serial in the *New Chronicle* by well-known science writer Richard Calder help to raise the prestige and public awareness of science fiction.

Of course, we have to put up with things like the film "Man from Planet X" but even that might not do so much harm as some people think. In the early stages of a new literary form, we must keep a level head and be tolerant with those to whose head the subject goes!

But by all means let us not keep silent. ASF is firmly behind everyone who voices a demand for better and more accurate science fiction.

THE MOON IS HEAVEN

By H. J. Campbell

CHAPTER ONE

Three Weeks To Go

The sand is so hot you almost wish you were wearing a space suit. A noon-day sun makes the world an oven as you stand waiting just outside the danger zone in a part of South America that has the double distinction of being called Cocopasi and being slap in latitude nought. It has another distinction, too, when you come to think of it.

This mountain in Ecuador will be the first to take the blast of a rocket that ought to reach the Moon. If it doesn't reach the Moon you reckon they'll put up an epitaph to those who didn't make it. And your name will be on the list.

Not at the top, of course. Up there will be the world-famous name of Atah Kark, the man who did so much to get the whole thing going, and who will combine the duties of astronaut and surveyor on the trip. Then will come the pilot and the chemist and the technologist and the man who risked his life to save his friends—someone always does that on a trip like this.

And then, way down at the bottom, will be your name. Any name would do. Few know it. No one will recognize it. But they will call you Mike, the thick-headed journalist who qualified for the post of observer because he happened to be exactly the right size and have the kind of lungs that don't mind being knocked about a bit.

Through the window of the hut, in the centre of the safety zone, she rises up—Tall, sleek, unfinished. A rocket that will be the embodiment of several million pounds, several million hours and—the embodiment of man's daring.

You drain your coffee cup, slip the empty vessel on to the

conveyor belt that takes it back to the kitchen, and wander over to the window. A tall, sleek symbol of man's questing fingers, exploring mind; an expression of his conceit, really. This, he says, is all very well, but it's too small. Man has the power to reach for the stars, why be content with just one world? Let's all go to the Moon!

Well, not all of us, not at first. Just a few to pave the way, to take the slipperiness off the stepping stone to space. To build the domes, rig the air plants, do a bit of miring. Get the whole thing straightened out for when the big white chicks come along.

And so the money came dribbling in. A bit from here; a bit from there. Soon there had been enough to buy a bit of mountain, then to put up a few shacks and stock out with some apparatus. The snowball started rolling. People didn't want to be left out. It came in by dimes and thousands. One little boy, who dreamed of following you one day, sent in his model rocket and told you to sell it for what it was worth. But everybody knew just how much it was worth—to the boy. There were several things like that.

After a year or two, the Government had realized that something was afoot. Thinking it over, they decided it was quite a good idea, really. This going to the Moon. It would have its uses—apart from prestige. So they chipped in with a couple of million—an amount equivalent in value to the tin, maybe, on the boy's rocket—and gave you a technologist to go with it and with you to the Moon.

You reckon he'll have a flag tucked away somewhere.

Atah Kack found his name appearing in even more papers and magazines. His project, too. By about 1958 things looked as though they might come to fruition after all. Now, in 1963 there are only a few weeks to go and then—the thought of it, the still, small voice of it makes you go cold somewhere down inside.

You think of the emptiness of that space out there. And, if anything should go wrong, the long, long way to fall—into the Sun.

A figure breaks away from the knot around the rocket and strides across the danger zone towards the hut. Atah Kark, coming to vet your latest report to the Press. A stickler for accuracy, Atah. Won't let anything through that isn't as true as knowledge will let it be. Never mind about sensation or drama or stuff like that. Tell 'em the truth and if they don't like it they can do the other thing. This is the real thing, with real problems and setbacks. The people who pay the piper must hear the real tune.

For yourself, you don't care two pins. A lifetime in journalism makes for cynicism about what people want when they pay for a thing. But Atah has faith. Maybe that's what kept him going over all the years of frustration and ridicule. Like when that other "scientist" back in '57 reckoned that Atah didn't know as much as he said he did. Reckoned in print, too. But when the world's experts in astronomy and astronautics mildly pointed out that Atah knew much more than he said he did, the other man climbed down—and Atah climbed up. It happened every now and then.

The hot door swings back and Atah comes in. His normal intent, searching expression is there, but it's split by a grin. Dressed at ease in a loose tunic and baggy pants, Atah drops himself into a chair and presses the button that will bring a steaming coffee cup from the kitchen out back.

The smooth Somerset accents drift across the still air in the hut. "This'll be your third from last report, won't it?"

You raise an eyebrow and come away from the window, giving him a quizzical look. His heavy laugh shoots out of him and fills the hut.

"Last before the blast-off, I mean! There'll be others, don't you worry."

"I'm not worrying," you say. "It's just that I'm scared."

The coffee cup comes whizzing along. Atah lifts it neatly from the belt and raises it to his lips, looking at you over the rim.

"We're all scared. Don't let that worry you, either. I wouldn't want anyone on this trip who wasn't a bit scared. Wouldn't react right in emergency."

"So you reckon there'll be emergencies?"

He sets the cup down. It's too hot. "Bound to be. You can't do a thing like this and demand that everything go according to plan. But we can handle all the minor things that might go 'wrong—so long as we act quickly enough."

"And the major things? Can we handle those?"

Atah stares through the window. You reckon that from where he's sitting he can just see the tip of the rocket's nose. He stares at it for a few moments, then looks back at you and smiles.

"Some of them. Most of them that might occur on the trip. But there are one or two things we expect to find on the Moon that may not be there. The emergencies might come long after we've landed safely."

And they'll go on, you think. Right until we get back here on Earth, or make some corner of a lunar crater a little piece of England with our bodies laid in a row. But that certainly *doesn't* worry you. You don't care where you die. Moon or Earth. It's just that you don't want to die.

You take the typescript from your pocket and slide it across the table to Atah. "I've told them that a tube blew on us," you say. "And pointed out that we should be space-borne in about three weeks."

Atah looks up. His untidy hair hangs a bit over his forehead, making him appear very much like a schoolboy who's more interested in things than appearances. Which is probably just about right.

"I don't know that we ought to tell 'em that hot bit," he says. "It'll be the first concrete date we've given for departure. They'll swarm out here like flies. Clutter up the place."

It's your turn to grin. "The whole truth?" you smile. "Isn't that what you wanted?"

Atah sighs. He's got a lot on his plate without all this, you reckon. But he's not the kind to shirk or delegate. If it's his job, he does it himself.

"All right," he grunts at last. "Let it go. It'll give the London Circle enough time to get out here."

"They're on their way already," you announce. "Had a cable from Sad Linell today. About thirty of them. Should be here in a day or two."

You like the smile that creeps over Atah's face. A smile that tokens pride, the real, true kind of pride. He's glad the Circle are coming, you can see that.

"Good," he says. "They won't clutter anything up. I'll be pleased to see 'em again, too. They're good boys."

Yes, they're good boys, you agree. And the thought takes you both back a few years, so that you are both silent, both knowing that you're thinking about the same things.

The London Circle. A small group of people who met regularly to talk about space flight and astronautics mingled inextricably with the more imaginative types of fiction. And Atah had been the link between fiction and fact, so that some who began as pure fictionists came to seek the solid scientific foundation for space flight—and were fired with the concrete idea of reaching the Moon.

Of course, there had been one or two pessimists among them. But the pessimists were part of it all, and were accepted by the Circle as an inevitable offshoot of something requiring faith and an impersonal approach.

And Atah had always been there. At every meeting, he was around to tell you how fast you must go, what fuel you need and hundreds of other things that lots of people would charge for. Slowly and softly he had made everyone see the utter necessity of reaching the Moon, until quite unconsciously they were supporting him to the limit—with their eyes wide open. Atah had converted them simply by telling them the truth.

It'll be good to have them along. So that they can be in at the peak point, actually see the rocket leave and

dwindle away in the sky, followed by their generous portion of good will. A good will that, under Sed Lindell's organizing, let them scrape up enough to bring thirty of them half-way across the world.

And what a world it is, you think. Still the same old stuff that started with a man dropping out of a tree and clabbing the man who dropped out beside him. The old stuff that goes on and on, without significantly altering the basic structure of things. Millions die. Millions come alive. The sun rises and sets on it all, day after day, century after century. And here and there a few men think and work on problems like getting to the Moon. Making the biggest advances of all.

You stop thinking about all that when you see that Atch has turned his attention again to your report. You light a cigarette and watch his lean face move slightly under the influence of the thoughts inside his head. His eyes travel rapidly across the pages. His nose twitches as the smoke from your cigarette reaches him. He doesn't smoke himself. Doesn't care whether you do. Has more important things to think about.

He reaches the last page, the last line, the last word. He lays the typescript aside and looks at you. Then a slow smile comes.

"All right," he says. "Let it go through. If they come, the mob, they won't like it, but it'll be their own fault."

A bead of sweat dribbles down your temple and you agree with him that they won't like it. Wherever they are, they don't realize the drudgery of it all. Even your down-to-earth reports won't have disillusioned them much. They are still carried away by the drama, the sensation of it. When they come they won't like the heat and the dryness and the primitive conditions you work under.

They'll have visions of a grandstand view from alcove buildings surrounding the launching site. Bars and cafes where they can congregate and talk and drink away the waiting period.

Instead, they'll have to find their own places out on the mountain top, between boulders, on the blistering sand and rock. And there won't be enough refreshment for more than a tenth of them. They'll have to fight for it.

The money wasn't spent in making a tourist spot. Every penny of it was needed for essentials. There's not one luxury on the site—unless it's Reina, the manager's daughter.

You stop thinking about Reina because you know it doesn't do you any good, and watch Atah finish his coffee. He stands up and stretches, then moves towards the door.

"Going back so soon?" you ask.

"That tube needs a lot of attention," he answers. "And we don't want to waste time."

You watch him go, swiftly striding again across the danger zone, and you know his thoughts are all on the blown tube. Everything else blotted out of existence. You reckon that's the way he gets so much done. He makes time.

You turn away from the window, go back to the table and pick up the pieces of paper that represent your reason for existence here. Just as you're going out of the hut, the door opens in your face and Reina comes in. You step back, reckoning that the transmission of your report can wait a while.

"Hullo, Mike," she says wearily. "Like to get me a coffee?"

One or two steps, one or two movements and her request is granted. She sprawls in a chair, one arm flung across the table, the other hanging down. Her flaming red hair is untidy, a straggling whip of it dangling in front of her wide blue eyes.

You step up and deftly smooth the hair away from her eyes. "Bad for the vision," you say.

She smiles and, tired as she is, a twinkle comes to her eye. She purses her lips as though she's trying not to smile, and lifts the coffee cup. You sit down beside her. You don't know what to say. She says it for you, glancing at the papers sticking out of your pocket.

"Are you telling them it's only three weeks?"

"Yep."

"And Atah's okayed it, I guess. Well, things'll start getting crowded around here. I'll be glad when it's over."

"So will I," you say. "When we've been up there, stayed a bit and come back—that's when I'll be glad."

Reina wrinkles her nose at you. "Coward!" she laughs.

And the way she says it, the ways she laughs, tells you you're not a coward in a way that nothing else could. But then, you happen to be very fond of Reina. That may have something to do with it.

"So, I'm a coward," you smile back. "Okay. But I'm going. I'm going right up there where you want to go. I'll bring you back a bit of moon-rock, or send you a post-card or something. Do you accept things like that from cowards?"

She settles back in her chair and doesn't look all that tired any more. She's enjoying herself, all right.

"A post-card, eh?" she says. "Or a stick of moon-rock?" There's something behind all this, you reckon. You know Reina. "Guess you haven't heard yet," she goes on. "But you will."

"Heard what? Has something happened? Don't tell me the trip has been cancelled!"

That's the only way to get anywhere with Reina, you've discovered. Joke about everything. Play the fool and she might play it, too. Then you might get something serious out of her.

But this time she isn't going to play. "Oh, you'll hear about it soon enough, Mike. Don't let it bother you."

She finishes her coffee and gets up. You walk with her to the door. Outside in the blinding sun, Reina pats on a straw sunbrella.

"See you at dinner, Mike," she says, and walks off towards the rocket.

Her boyish figure in the untidy slacks gets smaller and smaller. You stand there watching her, watching the way

of her hips, the tilt of the sombrero. She looks too slight and frail to be out here on the top of a mountain, the only woman among a couple of dozen men.

Her face is so smooth compared with theirs. Her movements so much more graceful. Her heart so much more human.

Then you reckon it might be the heat of the sun after all, and anyway that transmission has got to be done. So you turn away, whistling.

CHAPTER TWO

The Day

Morning drags impatiently on your eyelids, making you blink and blink again. The sunlight hurtles through the window and splodges a yellow smear on the wall in a geometric pattern whose name you've forgotten. You close your eyes again momentarily. Then you reopen them as a lead clang rings through the air. With that kind of row going on you might as well wake up.

You swing your legs off the bed and as your feet touch the floor, it cunts to you. This is the day!

It runs through you like a shock and you think once again that those three weeks didn't take long to pass. It almost seems that you went to bed last night with three weeks to go, and then woke up this morning to find it's today after all.

But, of course, it wasn't like that at all. As you start pulling on your clothes, you start to think of all the things that have happened in those three weeks. Quite a few things. The first important one was when the London Circle turned up.

Thirty happy faces, sixty willing hands to help with any kind of work that wanted doing. That was a great help and a great relief for everybody. There'd been plenty of rough jobs knocking around that had stayed that way because Allah didn't want to waste technical skill by detaching people to do them. It didn't take the London Circle long to get things ship-shape, even to make several dozen trips on the mountain railway and dragging up their own food and a good bit more for everybody else.

Great lads, they were. Yet the climax came when Seid

Liseli, on behalf of the whole Circle, presented Atah with a chronometer that had been subscribed for by the Circle. Atah hadn't known quite what to do. He'd just stood there with the gleaming instrument in his hands, looking from it to the ring of smiling faces and back again.

Then he'd led them all off to the rocket and let them all come in by fours and watch him installing the chronometer in the control room. Then they'd carried him back to the refectory and made him drink ten glasses of orangeade in quick succession. You'd stood by, watching it happen, wondering how many other world-experts on anything could be treated—and want to be treated—like this. There was something about space flight. And something about Atah.

The whole thing had been a high-spot in the dreary work of the project, something that made everybody forget the heat and weariness and the dull aching boredom of doing routine jobs. And then it was all over and everybody went back to normal.

You yourself managed to get another two chapters finished of the book about it all. Even as you were writing them, you couldn't help hoping you'd put the final chapters in yourself when you'd all got back to Earth.

The sultry days had passed. Things had got nearer and nearer to finality. Tension began to mount. A few people even got jittery and irritable, but Atah's sense of humour kept things going happily for almost everyone.

And then you'd got the shock of your life. Even now the thought of it makes you wobble as you pull on a sock, so that you have to sit down on the edge of the bed.

For days you'd puzzled about Reina's remarks to you about finding out something, but you just couldn't get it. You knew it was something to do with not being able to send her a post-card or a stick of moon-rock, but that was all. For a frantic moment, you thought that maybe they'd decided not to let you go up with them after all. But that wasn't so. You'd tackled Atah about it and he'd thought you were slightly mad. But then, he always had.

And then, one morning at breakfast, out it had come. When the whole crew were sitting round the table tucking into eggs and bacon and liver and chips, Atah had looked across at Reina and said:

"You're looking tired, Reina. D'you feel fit?"

The girl had smiled. "We're all looking tired, Atah. Guess we'd better all take a few days' rest before the blast-off."

That was when you had chipped in. "What do you want to rest for, you won't be blasting off?"

Reina had smiled a superior smile, with a mischievous glint in her eye at the same time. "Oh, won't I, Mister Observer? Just wait and see!"

Everyone had looked up at that. Reina—blasting-off? The whole thing seemed ridiculous. Maybe she had a touch of the sun. But no. Atah was coughing awkwardly and sending Reina a glance that wasn't the kind good-looking women usually get.

"I told you I hadn't finally decided, Reina——"

"Oh, come on, Atah. Face up to it. They might as well know straight away." She had turned her impudent, flaming head towards you and lifted up her chin, tip-tilting her nose.

"Gentlemen, I am coming with you to the Moon! I talked Atah into it, and it took some doing, so don't any of you try to talk him out of it."

Well, she'd dropped her bomb. And the concussion of it held everyone silent while the eggs and the bacon and the liver and the chips got colder and colder. You joined the rest in staring at her silently, until she spoke.

"Mike, for heaven's sake close your mouth. You look awful!"

"But," you said. "But——"

Then Clavier, the chemist, helped you out. His high French eyebrows had risen still higher, his little bit of a beard jutting out like an inverted cactus, expressive hands spreading wide, one with a knife, one with a fork.

"But, mademoiselle! How can you? You say you fly with us, but what of the fuel, the weight? You are petite, yes, but still you are an object for consideration in that respect."

"I don't know whether to blush or to be angry," Reina replied. "Maybe I won't do either of those things. There are very good reasons why I should come to the Moon with you. Atah and I have discussed them and he has decided that I am right. He is making a small adjustment in the amount of equipment we are carrying."

The technologist, Schnabel, didn't like that. "Zo! Vee are to do without things, eh? Just so Reina comes to the Moon, eh? And vat if we leave something zat is important? What happens then?"

Just like Schnabel, you thought. He's the only one of the crew who tries to stand on his dignity, tries to find fault with other people's decisions. You reckon if there's going to be any "human relations" trouble on the Moon, it'll come from Schnabel.

Atah wasn't coughing any more. His lips were set and he was looking at Schnabel. It suddenly struck you that the technologist had made a criticism of Atah's judgment, his wisdom in adjusting the equipment to compensate for Reina's weight. It amounted almost to an accusation of jeopardizing everyone's safety. Risking the success of the project.

If it had been you, you might have stormed and ranted at Schnabel, telling him what kind of person he is. But it wasn't you. It was Atah. He spoke calmly.

"We are not doing without anything, Schnabel. To compensate for Reina's weight, I have simply transposed a few pieces of equipment from the manned rocket to the unmanned follow-ups. I had already allowed for one of them to be under-weight to meet just such an emergency as this. We have all been working on this project for years. I am not likely to leave behind essential things."

Schnabel just grunted and turned away—his usual reaction when proved wrong. Then Leeson, the American pilot, put

a word in—a quite, reasoning word as suited his temperament.

"I guess we don't quarrel with your judgment, Atah. Most of us know you don't take chances like that. But—er—it'd be nice to know why you changed your mind about having women on the trip—mind you, I'm all for it!"

Reina got up from the table and began to move towards the door. Atah watched her with a slight smile on his face.

"Reina's quite a capable technician, I've discovered. And she can cook and sew and—well, I think she'd be useful on the Moon."

The girl flashed him a grateful glance and slipped through the door. When she'd gone, Atah lowered his voice.

"Now listen, chaps. That's not the only reason Reina's coming. There's a bigger, better one. But you've all got to keep your mouths shut about it and not let on to her that you know a thing. Just have some regard for her feelings."

You were as interested as anyone, and this business made you impatient. "Okay, Atah, we'll do that. But what's this big reason?"

"Well. As you know, we've got to make our own return fast. To do that we're assuming certain things about the Moon's composition. We may be wrong. If we are, then we may have to stay on the Moon a heck of a long time. We may never get back to Earth; you all know and accept that possibility.

"Reina's a queer girl. She's got her own ideas about things and people. Down here she fits into the codes because it's convenient. Up on the Moon there aren't any codes. And she reckons we'll be lonely if we can't get back. That's why she's coming. It's a great thing for her to do—even I see that. Let's respect her for it."

There was a slightly awkward pause while the information sank into everybody's heads. You felt a touch of nausea, feeling the way you do about Reina. And then the names was replaced by a burning rage as Schnabel let out a coarse guffaw. You stepped across to strike him, but he was up

and away before you reached him, out of the hut and laughing his way towards the rocket. Atah had grasped your arm.

"I know how you feel, Mike, but take it easy."

You'd swung round on him, still with the glass on your face. "You know how I feel?"

"Sure I do. I'm not all that blind or up in the clouds, you know. I'm looking to you, Mike, to keep an eye on Reina—and Schnabel."

With that, the breakfast table was cleared and everyone went about their duties. All day while you wrote, you thought of Reina—on the Moon with five men.

You find that you finished dressing some time ago. You've been sitting on the edge of the bed, staring out of the window. But you don't start thinking the old stuff. You don't tell yourself that now because you are leaving Earth. Earth never looked so beautiful.

Come to think of it, the Moon won't look so very different from this. Cotopaxi is a mixture of bright and dark as the morning sunlight slams against the rock and glides over the shadows. And there isn't even a black sky to rest your eyes against. You can quite imagine that, compared to this arid dustbowl, the Moon will be heaven.

Anyway, the breakfast bell goes and there's no time to think about things like that. You slip off the bed and walk straight out of the bedroom on to the sand—everything's on ground level here. A few yards along and you arrive at the refectory. The others arrive more or less at the same time, too.

There's an air of excitement about that very soon catches you as well. Atah is looking as though this is the day he's been waiting for all his life. Which it probably is. Leeson appears a little strained now that his pilotship will shortly be put to the critical test. Clavier walks around the breakfast table several times, telling everyone there's no need to be nervous and deliberately making his own hands shake.

Schnabel just sits and looks as if indigestion is the least that's wrong with him.

But it's Reina you look at most. You take a chair near her and lift her coffee cup off the belt for her.

"Thanks, Mike. How d'you feel?"

"Fine, fine. Somebody's taken my stomach away, but that doesn't matter. How about you?"

She suddenly looks at you as though you're the only person she could tell this to, the others are too busy with their own feelings. "Oh, Mike, I've been looking forward to this! You can't know what it means to me. I'm all a-tremble, but not with fear."

"Good girl," you say. "Hope you won't be disappointed when you get up there. It's a pretty dead world, you know."

"Oh, I'll love it! Not for long, of course. I'll want to come back. But just for a little while."

Just for a little while. Now that Reina's coming, you know that the time will be all too short. Unless there's difficulty in making return fuel, and Reina—but you don't think about that. Not now.

You start to speak again to Reina, but Atch begins and everyone falls silent.

"Today's the day, chaps—and Reina! We blast-off at noon. Take it easy. Rest all you can, don't eat or drink too much, and if you must smoke, smoke only a little. There's nothing at all for you to do. Reina's father has everything under control. I for one am going to lie down and read. See you here for a hot cup of coffee at eleven-thirty!"

He gets up and leaves the room. You and Reina drink the coffee, and, by unspoken agreement, you both stand up, smile at each other and cross to the door. As you pass through it, you notice Schnabel following Reina with his piggy little eyes.

You both stroll leisurely across the sand and on to the danger zone, towards the rocket. Complete and ready, the rocket stands there with her nose pointing up at the limitlessness above, a tall, sleek challenge to the expanding

universe. Way over to one side, the smaller unmanned jobs are standing. Waiting to be launched as soon as the main rocket is under way, bringing up mining equipment and chemical apparatus for Clavier.

As you get near the main rocket, you both have to bend your heads back sharply to see its nose. Even a tail fin is twice as tall as you are. And the air-lock is way above you.

Altogether the whole thing is an awesome sight. Something that makes you silent, that would make anyone silent. More grand than the Pyramids, more significant than Stonehenge, greater possibilities than the Ark. As you both stand there looking up at the great machine that will wing you a quarter million miles through space, you feel some kind of a bond rise up between you. Your arm comes up and rests lightly on Reina's shoulder. She doesn't move for several minutes, and then she turns her head and smiles at you.

Strangely enough you don't even want to kiss her. The idea behind it all is too big for that. Kissing wouldn't help, might make it bad. The only thing is to climb into the rocket and take off for the Moon together. And that will happen at noon.

Instead, you walk away to one side and sit down on a boulder. You talk about the Moon, about Atah, about the Moon, about Schrabel and Leeson and Clavier, about the Moon. You talk until it's time for coffee. But never once do you talk about yourselves.

Back in the canteen, with coffee cups steaming and light bread rolls freshly brought up by the London Circle boys from the town way down below, Atah sends his gleaming eyes from one to the other. His intent stare rests on each one for a few seconds before drifting off to the next. Finally he nods with satisfaction.

"Good. I can see you've all been resting. Everyone knows what to do. All you have to do is do it."

His heavy laugh rings round the hut and sets up just the

kind of atmosphere that you find around a coach taking school kids off for their annual heano. But there's a much deeper current underlying all this. A much more serious idea behind it all.

"I don't think we'll be worried by the mob," Atah goes on. "A special detachment of police from Popayan has arrived. They've put a cordon round the site that ought to keep wild elephants out. We'll let the L.C. chaps come out and see us on to the ship. Then they'll clear off the danger zone while we blast-off."

"That's a fine idea, Atah," Leeson drawled. "Those boys've done a great job around here these last few days. It's only right to let them see as much as possible."

There was a general murmur of approval. Everyone kept off the topic of Reins. The public didn't know yet that a woman was going on the trip—that had been the hardest part for you, not being allowed to break the story. But Atah thought they'd best get the news when you were all safely up in space.

Atah puts down his cap. He turns and walks out of the door. You all follow him.

CHAPTER THREE

Blat-off

A great cheer goes up from the mobs who have by now assembled on the other side of the police cordon. The sight of you all walking across the danger zone must have done something to them. Their shouts and yells are the kind of thing you find at football matches and boxing bouts, very similar to the mass response to a dictator's exposition or the last night at the Frama.

From the service huts on the other side of the danger zone, another procession starts out. It is the London Circle, led by Sed Linnell and the site manager. There's drama in the air, an electrical tension that makes your nerves quiver.

Not for the first time, you think that maybe you were a fool to come in on this crazy scheme. Flying to the Moon! Trusting yourself to a rocket that hasn't even been tested. Going a quarter million miles out into space—for what? So that you can be the first reporter on the Moon? So that you can be with Reina? So that you won't let Atah Kask down? You don't know. It doesn't matter. You're going and that's all there is to it.

Both processions arrive at the rocket about the same time. The London Circle are all on edge now that the critical moment has come. For years they've dreamed about seeing the first manned rocket take off for the Moon. And now they're going to do just that. It's too much for one or two of the ladies. They just can't stand it, and are having a quiet, unobtrusive cry.

Atah Kask and Sed Linnell shake hands, jovially and grinning. Then everybody else shakes hands, some not so jovially, some not smiling. The site manager gives Reina

a quick kiss. He's trying to be happy, but finding it a little difficult.

It's not so very different, you think. Not so very different from a terminal railway station in wartime, with the men off to battle and the kids off to the safety of the countryside. Some are glad, some are sad, some are just indifferent. And that's the way it is here—only, very few are indifferent.

Leeson climbs into the air-lock, both its doors wide open now. Another shout goes up from the crowd and you can almost feel the telephoto lenses peering at you on the end of the television cameras back among the mob, and the commentator's excited voice telling the world that the pilot has boarded the rocket.

Clavier bids an emotional adieu to all and sundry, turning his face towards the place where he knows the cameras are, and then climbs in after Leeson. Schnabel is next, and he does it with Teutonic abruptness, simply giving everyone a curt nod.

Then the row really starts as Reina starts up the ladder. Even in her slacks and at that distance, her flaming hair must make her unmistakable. You can imagine just how confused the commentator must be, searching for words trying to keep his mind on the job. Even the London Circle let out a great murmur—a murmur which rapidly changes to a cheer. Then with a quick wave of her hand, Reina is gone from view inside the ship. It's your turn.

Your handshakes are done, your partings over. You place a foot on the ladder and begin to climb, trying to ignore the sickly feeling way down inside you. It seems a long way up and the hand rails are hot. When you get to the air lock, your legs are playing tricks. But you have to keep up appearances so you turn and wave to them on the ground, the little pool of upturned faces. They wave back. You swing round and enter the rocket, just as Atah Kark begins to come up.

Once inside, you forget about Earth and the ground. From

now on all that exists in the past, something you might come back to some day, if you're lucky.

Rapidly you climb the little ladder that runs alongside the fuel tank and get up into the living quarters, which is a room about a tenth of the size of the fuel tank. The others are already strapping themselves down on the soft mattresses. You go over to yours, giving Reira a meaningless grin on the way.

You lie down on the mattress with your hands along the length of your body, wrists and ankles lying in the rowlock-like clasps. You hesitate a moment and then jab each index finger against the buttons that snap the clasps tight. It's rather like being strapped down for vivisection and you don't like it. Even though you've been through the drill a dozen times before, it doesn't seem any better. But you've just got to put up with it.

Steps on the ladder outside and Atah Kark comes in. As usual, he's smiling. He goes over to the control board and has a word with the pilot, who is strapped close to the board so that he's near enough to do things when the time comes. Everything seems all right. Atah takes a quick look round, glances at the chronometer donated by the London Circle, and climbs on to his mattress.

"Three minutes to noon, everybody. Watch the clock."

In your mind's eye you can imagine it. Everyone leaving the danger zone, getting away from the blast. Getting right outside yourself and the rocket and the Earth, you can see it happening. The Earth is whirling round on its axis at 0.28 miles per second at the equator. And you are on the equator. As soon as the rocket leaves Earth, it will be flung away by Earth's motion as well as by the power of its motors. That way, a useful bit of velocity will be gained.

You glance at the chronometer. In exactly two minutes from now the great craft will hurtle upwards and spin outwards in a long curve towards the Moon. You raise your head and look round at the others. They are taking it easy, eyes closed, body relaxed. You try to relax yourself.

You glance at the chronometer. One minute to go. What can one do in a minute? Nothing. You haven't even got time to get up and leave the ship. Before you'd get half-way down the ladder, the manager would have pressed the remote control release button and the ship would fly upwards. And you'd be crushed against the metal like a fly under an invisible swat.

You glance at the chronometer. The second hand is sweeping round, racing towards zero second. You find you can see it without raising your head. Fifteen seconds. Ten seconds. Five. Three. Two—

Twelve noon exactly!

The roar is much less loud than you had expected, but the pressure is worse. A great oppressive giant wants to squeeze you through the mattress, and all the time he croons a high whine into your ears.

Your head has been caught on the turn. You can't move it. You can't even close your eyes. You just have to lie there under that crushing hand and watch the chronometer. Two lines of thought go on at once. One is silly, made up of funny things about the London Circle—because they gave you the chronometer.

The other is not funny. It's all about astronautics. You don't know much about it, but you've picked up a few details from the technical points in your articles. You know that the rocket will rush straight up under a thrust of four gee to about sixty-two miles. That should take about fifteen seconds. It seems to be taking days.

Then it will curve over towards the horizontal and gravity won't have much effect thereafter, and will very soon fade out altogether, but that won't stop the crushing. You know that it's not gravity that's pushing you down. It's just the acceleration, and until the rocket's reached escape velocity that is getting bigger.

Through your confused and muddled brain the thought comes that Hermann Oberth did the work on this "synergic curve" and found that it enables a big reduction in mass

ratio to be made. You reckon that's good. You'd agree with anyone about anything if only they'd stop this crushing.

And then, very rapidly, it gets less. You realize the automatic timed direction rocket must have been fired minutes ago. The ship has turned and slowed.

Suddenly a swift, cold panic hits you. The crushing has been completely gone and it seems to have taken your weight with it. You feel bodiless, insubstantial. But understanding comes and you smile at this, your first experience of free-fall.

Alah's voice rolls through the cabin, still cheery, still confident that all's well.

"You can get up when you like everybody. Take it easy to begin with. Don't bump your heads!"

You bring your fingers down on the release buttons and feel the straps open. Gripping the mattress with both hands, you gingerly swing your legs round. They seem to want to go a lot farther than you meant them to. Yet when you try to stop them, they rush back and hit the wall. Muscular co-ordination has got to be learnt all over again.

Finally you manage to sit up. Alah is floating around the pilot, chatting about the course and suchlike things. The others are sitting up like you, staring a little scaredly around them—except Rosa. She is sitting cross-legged in the geometric centre of the cabin, with no support whatever, and looking mighty pleased with herself. She gives you a taunting grin.

"Lot of people said that women wouldn't make out very well in free-fall, Mike, didn't they? Looks like they were wrong, eh?"

"Wait until you get on to the Moon, my lady. See how you like it then!"

You shoot out a hand so as to point to her. The action lifts you right off the mattress and carries you across space and bumps you into her. You both move off in two new

directions like a couple of billiard balls, Reina laughing all the while.

Atah swings round gently, a soft smile on his face.

"Grasp a strap, you two. I don't want to spoil your fun in free fall, but don't let it go to your heads, will you?"

You suddenly feel very foolish, even though you know that Atah didn't mean it that way. A strap looms up in front of you and you grab it. You are now half-way up the wall. Looking around, you see that Reina is way up on the ceiling. The whole thing strikes you as being quite ridiculous.

Hand over hand, you pull yourself down and back to your mattress. But when you try to lie on it you find you can't. Each time your body hits it you bounce back with the reaction and hover in the air just above it. You decide to stay there. It's as good a place as anywhere else.

Atah has been doing a bit of juggling with his instruments. Taking bearings on various things. He gives the pilot a gentle pat on the back and grins round at you.

"Dead on course," he says. "Not bad at all. I expected a small error. Now we won't have to correct for it. That'll give us all the more fuel for reducing velocity on landing."

That's fine, you think. But it won't be for some time yet. It's going to take about eighty-three hours to get to the neutral point between Earth and Moon. And that's quite a while when there's nothing to do but float about like a departed spirit.

Then Loosen comes to the rescue. He dives a hand in his pocket without taking his eyes off the dials and screens, and brings out a small package.

"Surprise for you chaps," he says, and you can feel him grinning. "Something to while away the time."

The small package comes sailing through the air towards you. You reach out and pluck it. You miss it and have to watch it go whizzing by. Then, strangely enough, it

sticks itself against the metal bulkhead. A little shove carries you across to it.

Wedging yourself between the mattress and the wall, you unwrap the parcel, everyone else looking on with puzzled expressions. As soon as you take the paper away, a pack of cards becomes visible. You let out a whoop of joy.

Leson laughs. "Thought that'd please you. They're short steel that's been magnetised. If you play with them on the floor they won't get away from you."

He's right, too. When you let them go they drift slowly down to the floor and stay there, disarranging themselves only slightly as they strike it.

"Come on then," you say. "Is it okay for us to play?"

"Yep. You won't be needed for a while. Do what you like. And there's no law up here, remember. You can gamble if you want to!"

"Okay then. How about it, Clavier? Schnabel? Reina? What shall it be?"

"Poker," says Clavier, climbing off his mattress and pronouncing it "Poucarre." "I have see poker face!"

That's the last thing he's got, but still. Schnabel looks at the cards, purses his lips and then shrugs. "For a little while I will play. Then, I wish to read."

He scrambles down, too. Reina has floated across to a cabinet. She knows what's in them all because she loaded them. Now she turns round with a packet of sandwiches. The sight of them makes you feel hungry suddenly.

Reina gives herself a little push, glides over to the control panel and deposits a small pile of sandwiches in the air beside Atah and the pilot. Then she gives a quick swirl and shoots down to the three of you on the floor.

You start thinking that she does it very gracefully. That free-fall is her element. She floats so well, so charmingly—even if she is depositing nothing but a prosaic pile of sandwiches.

You settle down to the game. The hours drift by. It's quite pleasant. You can eat and play and cast occasional

glances at Reina. After a while, Loosen announces that the ship will definitely take care of itself for a bit and joins in the play.

Loosen suggests a gamble, that you play for pieces of the Moon. All are in high spirits, so all agree. Within an hour or so you find that you are the owner of the Leibnitz mountains, the crater Albategnius and the Mare Crisium. Since the English name for the latter is "Sea of Crises," you're not so sure you want it, but there it is.

You carry on playing until everyone possesses a few thousand lunar square miles and then by common consent it becomes time to sleep.

And it's the weirdest sleep you've ever had. You don't exactly dream of falling out of trees, but you certainly wake up sweating once or twice. And finding yourself unsupported doesn't help any. Fitful, you reckon they'd call it. Across the way when you wake up each time, you can see Reina curled up against the wall. You get an insane desire to go across and do something silly—push her up to the ceiling or something. Pour water over her and see it not run off. Things like that.

The thought strikes you that almost everyone has been acting a bit light-headed lately. Maybe that's what free-fall does to you after a bit. You chuckle and go back to sleep. A snatch of a dream comes where you're dressed up in purple robes, lording it over a sea of Schnabels, until a crisis occurs and you have to run up the Leibnitz mountains.

After a while you wake up feeling hungry. You propel yourself across to Reina, noticing on the way that Atah is still awake and doing things with the instruments. You dig Reina in the ribs and watch her float away as though she were just a balloon filled with gas.

She rotates as she rises and looks so peculiar as she rubs her eyes that you can't help laughing. That wakes her up pretty quick and she glares at you. But when you mention hunger it seems to remind her of something and she forgets about your laughter. Within a few minutes she's got the

food out and tacking into it beside you, only she's upside down relative to you. You have a short, silly argument with her about who is up and who is down. You seem to be looking at each other for longer than is necessary.

After another play of cards, another sleep, another feed, you reckon time is getting near. Atah confirms it.

"You'd better eat all you want and do anything else that's necessary, and then strap yourselves down. This is the most unpleasant part, but you've just got to put up with it."

Unpleasant's the word, you think. Not so much the sensation as the boredom. Fourteen hours of deceleration! First so gentle that you hardly feel it, slowly increasing until it starts to pin you down—only this time your mattresses will have to be up on the ceiling, because the rocket will come down tail first.

You hope everything's all right with the motors. If they fail, then the rocket can't help smacking the Moon at a speed of two miles a second. But they won't fail. Atah's sure of it. And there's the extra braking fuel that was saved by not having to correct the course. Everything's going to be all right. You tell yourself that again.

One by one everybody settles their affairs and shifts their mattresses up to the ceiling. They strap themselves down. So do you. Atah is the last to do it. Lenson has a special remote control mirror and set of firing buttons so that he can operate the motors and see the dials from his mattress.

"I'm firing now," he says.

You watch his finger come down on a button. There's a faint roar, a very gentle tug at you. And you know you are landing on the Moon.

CHAPTER FOUR

Arrived and Alive

Gradually, very gradually, the pressure increases. Lesson brings finger after finger down on the buttons, firing motor after motor as the rocket streaks down towards the Moon's inhospitable surface.

You lie back on your mattress and try to sleep. But sleep doesn't come. The uncomfortable weight pushing you away from the rocket's tail keeps you awake, and you think of what's going to happen when you land.

If all goes well, the rocket will settle gently on its tail and stand there until the blast-off for Earth again. In the meantime, a dome must be built for everyone to live in and to be waiting for the next party to the Moon. Surveys must be made so that your successors will have a better idea of what minerals and other materials are available. Air must be made.

But the biggest job of all will be the production of six hundred tonnes of hydrogen as fuel for the return trip. Unless that can be made there will be no return trip. Not until another rocket turns up. And that would not be for eight to ten months. If the unmanned rockets arrive safely, you'll have food for three months, no more.

As you lie there looking at the situation, there seems to be so many things that can go wrong. You've every confidence in Atah Kack. You know he's spent years studying just this situation. But you can't help thinking that something unforeseen is bound to happen. You hope it will be a minor point.

"How's it going, Les?" Atah asks.

The drawling American sends Atah a quick smile then

swings back to the mirror showing his instrument readings. "Not too bad. Still a good bit of fuel in hand, and velocity's dropping nicely. I don't think there'll be any trouble."

There is silence for a few moments. Then Clavier chaps in.

"Atah, I am not scared, you understand, it is just that I am but a chemist and do not know these things. What about meteors? I seem to remember that the Moon is showered via these things. Maybe one will hit us?"

Schnabel grins superiorly. Atah just smiles in his friendly fashion. "Maybe it will. But it's not likely. We have a one in ten thousand chance of being hit."

But Clavier wasn't finished yet. "And when we land? Is it the same then?"

"No. The chances are even greater that we won't be hit by a meteor. Remember that the Moon has an atmosphere. It's only ten to the minus four as dense as Earth's at sea level, but it stretches up much higher and stops all but the largest meteors. And the very large ones are so few that we can ignore them."

A happy sigh comes from Clavier. "Good," he says. "That is fine. Now I will sleep!"

You twist your head round towards Reina—and find she's looking at you. She turns away immediately. You lie there looking at her, at the flowing red of her hair.

There is a sudden high-pitched click that seems to come from nowhere and everywhere. You try to sit up but the straps hold you firmly down.

"Don't worry!" Atah Kack's voice says. "We've allowed for this."

You can see him getting out of his mattress and making his way up the wall, pulling heavily on the straps, fighting against the deceleration thrust. A moment or two later, Schnabel follows him. You can see the two of them up there, doing things to the wall. It's difficult, you can tell that. It must be like trying to mend a telephone wire at the top of a pole in a tornado.

But finally they are through. The white stops quite sud-

dearly, and the two men start the long crawl back to their mattresses. Atah grins at Clever.

"You must have put a voodoo on us," he says. "That one in ten thousand chance came off. But it was only a small meteor; it vaporised in the wall. We've lost a bit of air, but there's no great damage done."

But there would have been, you think. There would have been a lot of damage to everybody apart from the ship. Every atom of air would have been torn from your lungs, leaving you pop-eyed and gaping—if Atah hadn't allowed for that chance. The ten thousand to one chance.

You hope he's allowed for all the chances of that order. Things shouldn't be too bad then.

Lesson's voice comes across hard. "Got to stop it up a lot now, chaps. Take the strain!"

You settle back and wait for it. It comes. Lesson's fingers button the boosters into operation and that hand comes back and slams you against the mattress. This is almost worse than when you were coming off the Earth.

Lesson looks tense. You can see him blinking rapidly as his eyes fix from dial to dial. His lips fold themselves in so that you can't see them any more. You realise what kind of a man he must be, to be able to carry on making precision judgments under this strain. You guess it must be training. You're too modern to believe in breeding.

Then you can see him relax. His lips come into view again and he sighs. He shifts his head and sees that everyone is looking at him. He grins.

"We made it," he says. "There's no worry now. Haven't you noticed there's no drag any more?"

Suddenly you realise he's right. The ship isn't decelerating at nearly such a rate now. There's only a very gentle hand against you. The rocket must be nearly down. You must be practically on the Moon!

"Hell!" Atah exclaims.

He has got up off his mattress and gone across to the tiny

redarscope. He is now peering into it, staring at the shimmering screen.

You release yourself from the clamps and go across to him. The others, except Lesson, do the same and get there about the same time as you do. You are all in a huddle round Atah and the screen.

"What is wrong?" Clavier wants to know. "Something bad?"

Atah has a frown on his face for the first time since the trip began. That doesn't look so good.

"Pretty bad," he answers, almost absently. "Pretty bad. We're dead above a mountain range. That meteor must have knocked us slightly off course. A tiny change would make a big difference at that distance."

"But what does it mean, Atah?" Reina says, looking worried. "Is it really serious?"

That brings Atah to full consciousness of his surroundings. "Well, we've just got to wait and see. It shouldn't be long now. Instead of landing on a plain, we're landing on a mountain range. A number of things may happen."

He switches off the 'scope and sits down. You know he's trying to work out ways of avoiding things. You guess he hasn't got long. He looks across at Lesson, who hasn't said a word.

"When do we touch down, Lee?"

"Count twelve from now," Lee answers. "As soon as that. I'm sorry."

"Nothing to be sorry about," Atah returns quickly. "You others, grab the mattresses. We're liable to get shaken about a bit. Stay where you are until the ship is completely at rest. Don't try any heroics. Just take it—"

There's no sense in his going on. A rasping noise comes from outside and the control room shudders and tilts. You're grasping your mattress so you don't fall away, but you can feel the room trying to throw you as if it were a mad horse, or it were ship in the middle of an earthquake.

The tilt angle changes, there come one or two thuds and then silence and: stillness.

The first Earthmen have landed on the Moon!

After a short pause, Atah says: "Everybody all right?"

Everybody says they are. Reina is off her mattress and standing impatiently by the door.

"Come on!" she cries. "Let's go out and see the Moon!"

"Hold it, Reina," Atah calls. "One or two things to be done first. You'll be out there quite a while soon."

Atah goes over to a large cabinet and swings back the doors. Inside is a rack of spacesuits. Atah takes one and goes across to the other side of the room.

"Dress up now, chaps. And test properly. You only make one mistake with these things—and we all have to pay for it. Don't take chances!"

Schnabel spits out some coarse gutturals. You can see the fumble has upset him a bit, a blow to his dignity.

"Vy do we not put on the suit in see air-lock? Vy dress up here?"

Atah is already nearly inside his. "Because the air-lock may be damaged; the outer door, that is. And if so, and we opened the inner one—well, you know what would happen."

"Very wise," says Chevier.

Reina, much mollified, pulls on her own suit.

You get into your suit and flex your legs and arms. It's not too bad. The woven plastic covering gives you a fair amount of freedom and the helmet could be worse. Although you can't move your head up and down, you can at least twist it sideways.

The training you've had in the use of the thing comes back to you. You flick over the radio switch and listen. There's a bit of static but through it you can hear Atah Mark quite clearly. You glance around and see that everyone is now suited.

"Right," says Atah. "Let's go."

He opens the control room door and passes through. You all follow him. Down the ladder, past the empty fuel tank

to the air-lock. Atah waits until you are all around, then he turns the valves on the inner door. It swings open.

Straightaway you can see how wise Atah was. Through the open inner door there is a vision of incredible lights and darks—where it should all be dark.

"Looks as though we've had it," Atah's voice comes over the radio. "That outer door has taken a pretty stiff knock. Can you put it right, Schnabel?"

The technologist pushes forward importantly and steps into the air-lock. He goes over to the damaged outer door and runs his gloves over it. He takes his time, while everyone stands impatiently waiting to get out and see the Moon.

"Yes," he says at last. "Yes, I can do it. It will take a time, of course. Several weeks—and a lot of help. But I can do it."

Several weeks. That means Schnabel has got himself a nice soft job straight away. The air-lock is urgent. You can't leave until it's done. So, while all the rest are putting up the dome and making the hydrogen, Schnabel will be tinkering with the door.

"All right," says Atah. "Make it your first priority. Now let's get out of here!"

You all crowd round the outer door and fiddle with the valves. They are useless for their original purpose, but they still have to be undone before the door will swing open.

At length, after a bit of swearing, you get the door open. As it swings back, you remember that Reina's radio was probably on, too, and she must have heard. Well, she wanted to come.

And then you don't think about Reina any more. The landscape in front of you calls for every tiny morsel of your attention. The rocket appears to be lodged in a crevice about fifty feet above a wide plain that's brilliantly white. Across it, several miles away, there is another range of mountains, tall and jagged with great black chasms dotted about.

And the sky! There were no windows on the rocket and

this is your first view of space without air. It's black. Blacker than anything you've ever seen. Blacker, it seems, than the absence of light has a right to be. And it's speckled with burning points, red, white, green and amber. Millions of them!

Then you turn your head and see the Earth!

It looks pathetic, somehow, up there, hanging in the sky. A multicoloured circle with continents that look vaguely like the face of an unhappy baby, about to cry, not sure whether it should, or whether it even wants to. And you've come from there, all that way away.

Everyone must be feeling the same way, because there's silence for a good few minutes while you all cluster on the white rock just outside the air-lock and stare at the bleak, cold, dead world.

Then Atah doubles back into the rocket and comes out again a few seconds later with the tiny radio transmitter. He places it on the ground, swings the aerial round to face Earth and taps out a few pulses. It is the prearranged signal. The first message ever to be received on Earth from outside sources. You can imagine them waiting for it on Earth. See it make the front page. The signal they've been waiting for.

"ARRIVED AND ALIVE."

"Well," says Atah. "That's the drama over. Now to get cracking. We must get that dome up before we thought. There's no air left in the rocket and these suits will only keep us going a short time."

Schnabel looks around and groans. "This is hardly the place for the dome, is it? Hadn't we better find a place first?"

You yourself are already getting just a little tired of this surliness from Schnabel. God knows what it'll be like before the end of the trip. But Atah nods and agrees. You reckon he must have a pretty good respect for Schnabel's technical ability.

"Yes," Atah says. "Let's find the easiest way down to the plain."

Leeson has thoughtfully brought a coil of rope with him, which is a good idea. Most people think that because the Moon's got a gravity so much less than Earth, you can skip and jump about like a fabulous mountain goat. But you can't. You can still slip and fall pretty deep distances. The fall might not be too bad, but its effect on your space suit would probably put an end to you.

Even so, the lower gravity does make things easier. Leeson doesn't have to strain as he pays out the rope to Atah. He just stands at the top of the crevice while Atah scrambles over the rocks and plants his feet firmly on the ground. His muscles can quite simply take the reduced weight.

Very soon Atah disappears from sight behind the rocks. Then, a few seconds later, he tells you over the radio that he's reached the plain. All come down, he says, but lower the equipment first.

Leeson pulls the rope up again while you and Clavier run back to the rocket. Just as you are swinging open the equipment room door, Schnabel and Reina turn up, too.

"I can help," Reina says. "I can carry some stuff."

She says it as if she's afraid you might stop her.

"Sure you can," you say. "You'd better, too, if you want to earn your grub! Catch this!"

You toss her a box of bolts. She fields it cleverly, gives you a grimace and walks back to the edge of the crevice. Schnabel is scratching about inside the equipment room. A few moments later, he comes out with a great load of stuff and when you try to take some from him, he grunts and brushes past. You must admit that if he works like this all the time, he'll be worth his weight and maybe a little of his nature.

Then you grab an armful yourself and hike it back to Leeson. Clavier turns up with another load as you make your way back. In this way, very soon the whole of the equipment carried by the rocket gets piled up beside Leeson

who is doing his best to dispense it down to the plain. You discover that Schnabel is going down with each load to guide it and then coming back for the next. You start to revise your ideas about him.

It nearly comes to a fight when Clavier insists on giving Schnabel a rest, but things iron out in the end and the rest of the equipment gets carried down. Then you all follow it. Again Schnabel turns up trumps by making Leeson go down by rope, saying that he, Schnabel, has been up and down enough times now to know his way. Anyway he'll have to be up here quite a bit, working on the air-lock.

You all assemble around Atah on the edge of the plain.

"I think we ought to remain here," he says. "Partly to enable Schnabel to get up and down without a long walk to base. And partly because there's most likely to be snow in the crevices nearby than out on the plain!"

"True," Clavier agrees. "True. And we will be wiser to drill here, too. This is where the reservoirs are likely to be, as you say."

"Drill," says Atah, looking up at the sky. "We can't start that until the trailers arrive. They should be here soon. Let's get started on that dome. I hate these suits!"

CHAPTER FIVE

Beginnings

The thin steel sheets that were hoisted close to the rocket's hull don't take long to set up. The fifteen of them are quickly assembled in the shape of a hemisphere, the actual sealing up job done by Schnabel. You watch him as he cuts the groove for the base with a small oxywelder, the rock turning to a sluggish lava and then solidifying round the base of the steel sections as Clavier gently lowers them down. Making a nice, air-tight fit. The man knows his job all right.

Then he climbs the rungs on each section and gets the welder to work on the seams, sweeping it down in long, easy arcs, using up a couple of dozen rods to fill the cracks.

While he does that, Clavier goes off and scrambles up the lower parts of the mountain. Soon he disappears down a crack. He is looking for snow. Reina and Leeson arrange the oxygen bottles that'll give the dome its first atmosphere. They link them up with tubing and connect a manometer to the common duct that will be pushed into the dome. Atah Kark is busying himself with the rest of the equipment, checking its efficiency, seeing if the jolt damaged it at all.

You just make accurate notes of all that's going on. Partly for the sake of the archives and partly for those who come later. There may not be anyone alive to tell them the story. Your job is to make sure that every pitfall, every difficulty is recorded in full detail. Atah thinks that's essential.

Suddenly Atah's voice comes over the radio. "Here's the first trailer!"

You all swing round and follow his pointing hand. Way up in the sky there is a moving dot. It's the time-controlled

braking jet on the trailer rocket. Slowly, very slowly it drops lower and lower. There seems no doubt that it's going to land on the plain.

And it does. There must have been a superfluity of fuel for the jets continue to burn for a few seconds after the tail fins touch down. But before they are out, you and Reina are racing across the plain towards it. Atah crackles through to you again, his voice terribly near.

"Don't run so fast! There's not all that much rush, and I don't want you to get heat stroke!"

You both slow down and walk towards the trailer rocket at a fast pace. You're anxious to see what has turned up. Reina impulsively reaches out a hand towards the rung on a fin. You grab her arm and pull it back. Then you look sheepish.

"Sorry," you say. "I thought it was hot. Forgot about the atmosphere not being nearly the same here."

She gives you a satisfied grin through the window of her helmet and starts to say something. Then, as if remembering that everyone could hear it over the radio, she stops and turns back to the fin. In a second or two she is up by the release lever. She tugs at it and jumps clear.

You both back away from the rocket and wait while the clockwork disruption mechanism works itself out. Then there's a silent disintegration before your eyes. Even though you've seen it many times back on Earth when they were testing the trailers, you still find it intriguing the way the rocket just falls to pieces in a perfectly orderly manner, releasing its contents gently to the ground and turning itself into several pieces of useful metal and a perfect nuclear reactor.

But just as you step forward, the ground shudders terrifically, and Atah's voice calls loudly over the radio, telling you to duck. Without waiting to see the cause of it all, you sweep out an arm and place it heavily behind Reina's shoulders, bringing her down to the ground with you. You lie there, staring into the fine layer of Moon dust.

"Okay, you two," Atah says. "Up you get. Heck!"

He sounds quite a bit put out and you wonder why. But as soon as you turn round to face the dome, you see why. On the harsh white surface of the plain there are several black and gleaming objects that weren't there before.

"What's happened?" Reina wants to know. "What was that shudder?"

You point to the bits and pieces. "Another trailer. Only this one didn't land the way it should. Looks like its load of equipment has gone under. Hope it wasn't essential."

But even as you say it, you know that it must have been essential. Atah Kark would not load up a trailer with stuff that wasn't really needed. It's just a question of the degree of necessity.

"Suppose it was the mining plant?" Reina asks in a low voice.

You won't suppose that. You won't suppose that until it's no time for supposing any more. That mining plant is the key to return fuel. Without it—No. No, you're not supposing that.

"Let's get this equipment back," you say abruptly. "We'll find out soon enough what's gone."

Stuff that would be unobtainable on Earth is quite light as you both return with armfuls of it to the dome. You are carrying the nuclear reactor; Reina has the rest of the apparatus. Pretty important apparatus, too. It's going to supply you all with air by the electrolysis of snow or water. That's if Clavier does his stuff properly—and he'd better.

Atah and Leeson are poking about in the wreckage of the second trailer as you pass them on the way to the dome. You call out to them, forgetting for the moment that your voice will go over the radio.

"What's the score? Anything serious?"

Atah doesn't look up. He is scrabbling intently among the bits and pieces, picking up odds and ends. Leeson looks over at you and shakes his head inside his helmet.

"All depends on your viewpoint. It's not survival stuff

we've lost, but Atah's surveying kit. He may not be able to tap resources so well."

Well, you think. That's bad for Atah, but it could be a lot worse for everybody. You aren't going to worry about it.

Hugging the reactor safely against your chest, you walk on to the dome. There are things you'd like to say to Reina, but the thought of the others hearing stops you. At the dome, you see that Clavier has turned up again and is at work on the oxygen supply equipment. He looks up as your jet black shadow falls across him.

"You are the most untransparent man I have ever seen," he says good humouredly. "Kindly step aside if you wish to continue breathing—Ah, what have you there? The apparatus for electrolysis? Bles! Now I can work. I have found a big, big—how you say?—deposit of snow. We will have plenty of air."

That at least is something, you think. Air and food will keep you going, even if it's not very pleasant. You should be able to last out until Schnabel gets that leak fixed.

The technologist has already welded the shuttling into the base of the dome. Now Clavier carefully unscrews the valve that releases oxygen from the bottles. The mercury in the manometer slowly drops as the vacuum inside the dome begins to fade away. It's becoming livable inside there.

Pretty soon, everyone is standing around watching the cooing of the oxygen into the dome, watching the mercury drop until there is no vacuum at all, but a positive pressure. Then Clavier cuts off the supply. Reina steps towards the air-lock in the side of the dome and starts to open it. Clavier calls her.

"Not yet, Mademoiselle Reina, please! There may be a leak of some size." He turns to Schnabel. "Not that I doubt your work, my friend, but we cannot take chances, eh?"

The technologist nods without answering. You can see he's confident that there won't be a leak. And he's right.

As you all stand and watch, the level of the mercury stays the same. There are no leaks. No appreciable leaks, that is. And it's only appreciable leaks that count.

"Aloft!" says Clavier. "You can go in now, Reina."

Schnabel has made just as good a job of the air-lock as he has of the welding. It functions perfectly. Only large enough to hold two at a time, it is absolutely air-tight and safe. The door to comfort and security.

Reina and Schnabel go through, followed by Lesson and Clavier. Then you and Atah step inside and fasten the outer door.

Inside the dome the others have already removed their suits and are looking flushed with excitement and exertion. Reina looks marvelous. You take your own suit off and feel a new springiness in your step come with the freedom.

Reina had already placed certain things on the site before the dome was put up. Now she starts to make good use of them by preparing a cup of tea. A great shout of approval goes up, from Atah as well.

You must admit, the scene looks quite cozy. Light comes from the lamps attached to the space suits, which have been laid around the floor. Later on there will be a single ceiling lamp fitted. Six hanks are arranged round the circular wall. At the moment they are just rude supports, but soon the mattresses from the control room will be brought down. They should make for a good night's sleep.

In the centre of the room is a small nuclear heater, its temperature level controlled by cadmium rods, on which Reina made the tea. It will have the second function of keeping the dome warm during the long lunar night. You remember that Atah chose it because it's the only form of heater that doesn't consume air. For air will not be all that plentiful.

Next to the heater stands a cabinet that houses Reina's domestic utensils—the bare essentials for eating and drinking. There won't be any washing on this trip. No shaving either. You reckon the men are going to look pretty grim by the

time its over. Anyway, the Moon is at least devoid of parasitic fauna!

You all sit round on the benches, sipping tea. Atah outlines the routine.

"We'll work by Earth time, of course. It's the only sensible thing to do. That London Circle chronometer will keep accurate if it's wound up regularly. Quite an anachronism, really! You'll see to the winding, Reina, will you?"

Everyone laughs about the anachronism. Reina nods. "Sure. I'll mark off the days, too. Earth days *and* lunar days."

"Good," Atah nods. "The next thing is to get the electrolysis working. What d'you need there, Clavier?"

Clavier raises his eyebrows and spreads his hands, coming peevishly near to spilling the tea. "Help," he says. "Lots of help for moving the snow. I shall need a great deal of snow and the—the deposit I have found will not last very long."

"You want us to dig for water?" Atah asks.

"That would be marvellous. If we can find a reservoir, our troubles will be greatly simplified, but greatly!"

Atah glances across at Schnabel. "What about that? When can you start, Schnabel?"

The technologist shrugs. "Straight away, if you wish. But there is the air-lock. I cannot do both. We cannot leave here until the air-lock is repaired. Sort yourself."

Atah frowns a little, then chases it away with an effort. "How about showing Lesson and Mike how to use the drill? Then you can work mainly on the air-lock and just supervise the mining. Would that be all right?"

Schnabel grunts. "If they can learn, I can teach."

"Take it as read, then. Now, Clavier, you know you've got to collect the hydrogen from the electrolysis. It's got to be compressed and liquified. Can you handle that?"

"Oh, yes," Clavier responds. "I have a compressor on

the third trailer rocket. "I shall pump the hydrogen straight into the fuel tank up there in the main rocket."

"Can you do all that without help?"

Reina jumps in. "I can help with that. I shan't be cooking all day!"

Clevier smiles. "Delighted, mademoiselle."

"Well," Atah says, standing up. "That takes care of things for now. Let's get going, shall we?"

Most everyone has finished drinking tea. You all climb into space suits again and troop through the air-lock. Out on the plain the last two trailer rockets have arrived, intact.

"Thank God for that!" Atah breathes over the radio. "There's your compressor, Clevier. And Schnabel's mining stuff. You two get cracking, eh? Mike, Lesson and I will bring the stuff down from the control room. Reina can be attached to Clevier."

Like heck, she can, you think. You've got your own idea who she's going to be attached to.

Clevier and Schnabel go off across the plain towards the trailers, while Reina starts rigging the electrolysis apparatus. She seems to know what she's doing.

You follow Atah and Lesson up the rocks towards the ship, which is standing more or less on its tail, but with a pronounced list, about fifty feet up the slope, in a shallow crevice.

Climbing is fairly easy, even in the suits. It's almost exhilarating to be able to propel yourself upwards by a hefty shove of the hand. But you take care not to catch the suit on one of the jagged points. The woven plastic is tough but you can't ask too much of it—and momentum has the same value of mass times velocity here as it has on Earth.

The ladder presents less difficulty going up than it did coming down. You manage to get through the outer door of the air-lock quite easily. Then, up to the control room.

"Throw the mattresses down," Atah instructs you.

"There's no need to carry them. I'll bring the chronometer."

You bet he will! While you and Lesson drag the mat-

trusses to the door and tip them out down to the air-lock. Atah carefully unscrews the chronometer from the wall and carries it gingerly over to the door. He's not taking any chances with his present from the London Circle.

Leeson and you climb down the ladder past the fuel tank. You both do it quickly, getting used to the one-sixth gravity. But, looking back, you see Atah coming down a rung at a time, one hand steadying the chronometer, which he has strapped to his chest anyway.

You glance at Leeson and smile. He smiles back. You both understand Atah.

Getting the mattresses through the damaged air-lock is a bit difficult but you finally manage it. Then there's the slow climb down the rock with them. At length you get them over to the dome, but Clavier won't let you go in. It appears he has let the air out. You ask why the blazes he did that and he tells you."

"A brainwave, Mike. A veritable brainwave. Why, I say to myself, why make see oxygen out here and pump it into the dome, when I can release it in there immediately? It would be foolish, my friend."

He shakes his head and says it as if it had been your idea from the start. Apparently he let the air out by getting Schnabel to weld a pipe through the wall. This pipe leads to a tank outside which will be filled with snow. Inside the dome, the pipe will drip water into a smaller tank in which the anode will be lodged, run through the present oxygen alkalic.

Another pipe from the outside tank will lead straight from the compressor, where the cathode will give off hydrogen. As Clavier said, a veritable brainwave! Just so long as the compressor and the two tanks remain in electrical contact. But Clavier probably knows how to deal with that.

"Fetch some snow," he says. "Fetch lots of snow. We must start electrolysis as soon as possible."

Leeson looks at you and grins. "No snowball fights," he says. "This is serious!"

You leave Clavier and Reina fiddling with the tanks and things, and get yourselves each a bag from the pile of equipment. They are soomy and tough, but lighter than most leathers.

Atah catches sight of you. "Hi!" he calls. "My bags! What are you doing with my specimen bags?"

Lesson waves to him and draws out the answer, "Collecting snow! As Schnabel would say: air or specimens, suit yourself!"

A jumble of voices comes over the radio. Atah's and Schnabel's. The technologist is saying something about sarcasm. Atah is giving you the green light. You make the jumble worse by laughing into your mike and swing away towards the rocks.

The radio clears and Clavier chimes in with directions. "Right down the gap where the ship is. Then turn right. The snow is a few dozens of feet away. Bring a lot of it!"

Simplest thing in the world, you think. Dive down a canyon and haul out half-a-hundredweight of snow. Easy. However, it's got to be done.

Anyway, at the edge of the crevice you find it's not going to be so bad getting down. The sides of the canyon are very rough, full of footholds. Lesson goes down first, switching on his suit-lamp. It's uncanny how no beam appears. Just a circle of light on the walls. You know that's because there's no air with dust particles to disperse the light, but it's still uncanny.

You have your own lamp on and see that Lesson has reached the bottom. Immediately, the beams become visible, glancing off the dust particles his feet stir up on the ground. Particles that settle so slowly.

"Here it is," Lesson exclaims. "Here's the snow!"

He has been working his way ahead along the canyon, avoiding the smaller crevices leading down out of this one, and now his lamp shines on a patch of scintillating whiteness.

Impulsively he steps forward on to it—and immediately sinks from view.

CHAPTER SIX

Survey

For a moment you don't believe it. It's incredible the way he just disappears from view in a couple of seconds.

Then you decide that Lesson needs your attention. "What's happened?" you ask into the mike.

"What's happened?" Lesson mimics. "He sees a man fall into a snow pit and he asks what's happened. Holy mackerel!"

Then follows some more epithets on snow, the Moon and reporters at large. While it's going on, you lie down flat and feel your way carefully forward. At one point your hand plunges down and touches something hard that's vibrating. Lesson's helmet!

"All right," you say to him. "Stop boofing and reach a hand up here. I'll pull you out."

His language slackens as he does so. You grasp his hand and heave, thinking it's a good job he had his helmet on with its oxygen supply. By now he'd probably be drowned or something. He comes out easily enough, his weight being only one-sixth normal, whereas your muscle power is the same as on Earth.

Very soon his natural good humour comes back and he's laughing. "After which little interlude," he says, "let's go gather snow—with care!"

You do that. You both fill your bags with the stuff, which is very finely divided, almost like a powder. Then you get back up the crevice with them, a task that's not at all simple and one that raises your temperature considerably above the flow level of your suit's insulation. Sweat starts running off you.

Back at the dome, Clavier and Reina have rigged the set-up for electrolysis. "Tip it in the tank," Clavier instructs. "We will start up straight away."

The others cluster round to watch the establishment of the process that is going to give them breath—and hydrogen for the return.

"What'll the capacity be?" Atah asks.

"If it works as it should," Clavier replies. "One tonne of oxygen and one-eighth tonne of hydrogen per hour. Maybe a little less."

Atah does a bit of mental calculation. "That means it'll take us 4,800 hours at the least to get 600 tonnes of hydrogen. That's thirty weeks. We'd better find that reservoir!"

Reina chips in with a bit of domesticity. "We've food enough for that length of time, but in case anything goes wrong I suggest we start a rationing scheme. Use it wisely, in other words."

"Everything's got to be used wisely," Atah returns. "But I'm sure you can do that, Reina. Work it out yourself."

Clavier gives out an exclamation. "Start the compressor, Reina. At once!" He turns to the rest of you. "See! It works. See the mercury falling in the manometer. The dome is filling!"

Lesson appears to be struck by a sudden thought. "What about the carbon dioxide formed by our breathing? What happens to that?"

Clavier lays a gloved hand gently on the pilot's shoulder. "Taken care of, my friend. Both the carbon dioxide and the water from our breaths will be sucked out by my separator. The water will be run back for electrolysis and the carbon dioxide will be liquefied and stored. Later, for others maybe, it will be useful for making organic compounds."

The pilot raises his eyebrows in admiration. Atah smiles slowly. Schnabel grants. The technologist has been standing by impatiently, obviously miffed at losing the limelight to

Clavier. He feels, you reckon, that his is the most important work to be done.

Apart from that, the scene is peaceful. Almost like a research station on Earth. People standing around in listlessly interested attitudes watching a process at work. The sun's rays melting the snow in the tank, so that a constant stream of water runs through to the anode in the dome. The uncannily silent piston stroke of the compressor, running down the hydrogen from the cathode, turning it into a liquid. And above it all, the unmoving, unmoved terrain that has stood there changeless for centuries, eons. For a moment it strikes you as wrong that man should come and set up his domes and compressors and things. Disturb the peace, dig into the rocks, electrolyse the snow. But that's sheer sentimentality, and there's no room in the modern world for that. You stop thinking of that.

"Well," Schnabel grunts. "Are we going to do some mining now that we have seen the miraculous electrolyser at work? I would like to start on the air-lock immediately."

Atah frowns and Clavier represses a comment with a firm effort. Reina unashamedly turns up her nose (as far as she can within a space helmet) and walks away towards the compressor. Lesson's jaws are champing drily inside his helmet. No one seems to like Schnabel. But then, he probably doesn't like himself.

"I think it's time for a rest," Atah says. "We've accomplished quite a bit already, and we don't want to tire ourselves. I think we'll go into the dome and get some sleep. That is, if you think the air supply is safe, Clavier?"

The chemist shrugs elaborately and lifts his eyebrows. "I cannot be certain, of course. But at least *I* am prepared to come in with you! Such is my faith in the apparatus."

"Good enough," Atah smiles. "How about you others?"

Everyone but Schnabel agrees that a rest would be a good thing right now. The technologist may be afraid of the electrolytic apparatus, or he may just want to make himself

out different. Whatever it is, he announces that he has no need of a rest, that important things need doing, and that he intends to go up and make a start on the air-lock—if Atah doesn't mind, of course!

"Not at all, Schnabel," Atah says. "I'm glad you can keep going. But don't knock yourself up, will you. We'll be needing you quite a bit later on, you know."

Schnabel smiles, if you can call it that. "I know. But I shall not knock myself up, as you say. I will be fitter than all of you at the end."

And he walks away towards his equipment. Reina, who came back from the compressor just in time to hear the last few remarks, bites inside her helmet. "Oh, the beast. The horrible, arrogant beast!"

Then she turns away and makes for the dome's air-lock. She can't have realised what everybody else has realised—that Schnabel must have heard every word she said. But the technologist gives no sign of having heard. He collects up his gear and moves off towards the rocks.

Atah follows him for a moment with his eyes, serious, troubled eyes.

"Well, let's go inside," he says. "A bit of sleep will do us good."

After a while, you wake up. At first it's the old stuff; you don't know where you are. But that doesn't last for long. You pretty soon realise that you're up on the Moon, separated from the vacuum of space by a few milligrams of steel. You remember, too, that you are dependent for breath on that hissing contraption over in one corner. If the current should fail. . . .

But it's not as bad as that, really. You've all got spare oxygen bottles for the space suits, that would last long enough for the electrolysis apparatus to be repaired.

You lie there thinking about things like that. And thinking about Reina. You start to wonder why she really wanted

to come, deep down inside herself. But that line of thought comes near to hurting at times, so you drop it.

Instead you think that she'd better calm down a bit or else learn to shut her radio off when she wants to let fly. You reckon a man like Schnabel doesn't react at all well to being called an arrogant beast. Even if he is one.

But is he? That's a problem you've been trying to solve for years, with Schnabel and other people. Right now he's up there, working on the ship. Trying to get the air-lock repaired so that everybody will leave safely. He's wrestling with steel and rivets while you just lie and stare at the dim ceiling. Can a man who does that be arrogant?

But you still don't get a chance to work it out, because you hear a noise and look up to see that Atah is getting off his mattress. You don't respond for a moment. You just lie there and watch him.

Fully dressed like everybody else, he stands there for a moment rubbing his chin. The stubble is beginning to make itself felt. Then he jerks the hand up and sweeps his untidy forelock back into place somewhere on the top of his head. He stoops and picks up his helmet. Time to speak, you reckon.

"Going out, Atah?" you say in a low voice so's not to wake the others.

"Yea," he replies, fingering the helmet. "I've had enough sleep. Thought I'd make a short survey. Get a little further ahead."

He stops, still fingering the helmet. Suddenly you catch on. He'd like someone to go with him. Not because he's frightened or anything like that. You know why he wants someone else. A witness. So that if he comes across something incredible, there'll be someone to bear him out. Scientific confirmation, he'd probably call it.

"Mind if I come with you?" you ask. "I won't get in the way. Besides, I ought to come along so's to write it up later."

"That'd be fine," Atah smiles. "Get your helmet on then."

As you swing down off the mattress, another figure looms up in the dimness. It's Reina.

"I'm coming, too," she says. "I want to see the Moon!"

Atah chuckles. "All right. Come if you will. But it's not going to be a luxury tour."

You laugh, and the laughter disturbs another sleeper. Leeson. He sits up with a jerk and stares around. He yawns and flops back on his mattress. Then he jerks up again suddenly and swings himself down.

"Where's everybody going without me?" he asks, stifling another yawn. "You wouldn't be doing the shanghai trick, would you? Leaving me here just because I fell into a snow pit?"

"Okay, okay," Atah says. "Let everybody come! Why not wake Clavier and let out a yell for Schnabel? Then we could all push off and leave the dome unattended!"

He reaches down for his helmet and has it on before anybody else. You reach for your own and pull it on. Then you catch sight of the sleeping chemist.

"What about Clavier?" you ask Atah. "Do we let him sleep?"

Atah nods. "Yes. He probably needs it, being an emotional type. And anyway there ought to be someone here to keep an eye on the electrolysis gear."

Reina giggles into the radio. "Fat lot of eye-keeping he's going to do."

"He'll wake if anything goes wrong," Atah says. "These chemists have an instinct! Let's get going anyway."

After checking your suits, Atah and Leeson step into the air-lock. You wait with Reina while they pass through. There are one or two things you'd like to say to her, but there's only the radio and what you want to say wouldn't apply to Leeson and Atah. When the all-clear buzz sounds, you open the inner door and wave Reina into the lock. You

step in yourself, close the inner door and open the outer one. Once more you are out on the dead, cold Moon.

Atah has already grabbed himself a bag and a hammer. He's striding off across the plain with Leeson close behind. You give Reina a shove and walk fast to catch up.

"Wonder how friend Schnabel is getting on," Leeson says.

Atah sends him a swift look, then looks away. You nudge Leeson and point to the radio antenna on your helmet. Leeson nods, remembering that if Schnabel has his radio on he can hear all you say.

"Making a good job of it, I reckon," Leeson adds, giving you a broad grin. "That guy sure knows his stuff."

You reckon it's time to change the subject. "Looking for anything in particular, Atah?" you ask. "Or is this a general survey?"

Atah doesn't slacken his stride. "Well, it's general in a way. We've got to collect data and then classify it. But I want to keep my eye open for sedimentary rocks. This atmosphere is attenuated all right, but there's a slim chance that a bit of weathering took place in the past. It'd be fine evidence to come across sedimentary."

He's probably right. You wouldn't know, although you get the general idea of it. The Moon was formed from cooling gases that turned into rock, igneous rock. And when igneous rock is weathered, it becomes sedimentary rock. That much comes back to you from high school days. It's all you need to know.

The pace you're all making would be fantastic on Earth. Here the lesser gravity lets your muscles do amazing things. Even Reina is taking six-foot strides. Within a few minutes you are nearly across the plain.

You glance around. Under your feet the rock is gray with occasional bright streaks that lead away into the distance behind you. The greyness is caused by innumerable tiny pits, diminutive replicas of the craters. Every now and then, Atah bends down and peeks into one of the larger pits. Some-

times he takes a sledge at it with his hammer, picks up some of the resulting fragments and pops them in his bag. The whole thing looks like a Nature riddle.

Above you the sky is jet black and peppered with eyes that stare at you boldly, unwinking, as if asking what are you doing here. You stare back at them and tell them silently that you've as much right to be there as they have, since you are part of the same scheme as they are and are following through your destiny just as they are. Then you think this is getting a bit too theatrical and turn away.

The Earth is still up there, only with a different face now. It's been turning all the while you were asleep. Rolling round just the way it's been doing for millions of years. That's the theme of it, the thing that gets you. Once, long ago when you went down to Cornwall for a holiday and stood in a cove at the foot of the towering cliffs, you felt how long these rocks had stood there, unchanged, unchanging while men went about their silly tasks and troubles.

It's the same up here only more so. More dramatic, more overpowering. All this is bigger than the Cornish cliffs. Older, too, probably. And all that time, it's been looking down on the turning Earth, remote and lifeless while nations and cultures rose and fell.

Until a few men looked up at its pale radiance and let an idea take fire within them. Until they'd thought and worked and badgered people and raised money and worked more and thought more and finally worked it out and made the thing that would take them up and let them down in the midst of that radiance that wasn't pale any more. From now on, you think, irrevocably, the face of the Moon will be changed. Its own changes will look down on the changes below and it will be left to Mars or Mercury to keep the changeless vigil. And in time, of course, their turn would come. Until at last the very outermost planet would come under man's reaching hand.

And so on. Beyond the Solar System. Beyond the Galaxy. Out to the place where Einstein says space curves back on

itself. And then—and then—but you can't take it from there. You want an Einstein for that.

Suddenly you realize that Reims is talking to you. You'd been walking along, staring up at Earth, round at the mountains, the plains, the crater rings, and you'd not been taking in the stuff coming over the radio. You hadn't, in fact, noticed that Atah and Leeson have turned back towards the dome.

"I said are you going to walk all round the Moon?" Reims repeats. "Because if that's your idea, you can do it alone!"

You laugh and turn back with her, hurrying to catch up with the others. You remain silent, still thinking the great thoughts about eternity and such like. It's all so big!

Back at the dome, you all go through the air-lock. You and Reims go in last. When you get inside you find Atah and Leeson staring down at Schnabel. He is on the floor and there's a thin trickle of blood running from his head.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Rebellion

On the face of it, things don't look so good, you tell yourself. You glance at Reina to see how she's taking the sight of it. Quite well. She immediately drops on one knee and lifts Schnabel's head. Quite the wrong thing to do, medically, but it shows the right spirit all the same.

"He's alive," she says over the radio. No one has taken his suit off yet.

"Thank God for that," Atab breathes. "What happened, d'you suppose?"

Lesson grunts. "Clavier don't seem to be around. Not his suit. Reckon they didn't see eye to eye about something or other."

That's about the size of it, you think. Schnabel must have come back and started something with Clavier. The excitable chemist no doubt retaliated as no gentleman should—unless he's dealing with someone who isn't a gentleman.

Atab has got his helmet off and is kneeling by Reina. He stretches out a hand and touches Schnabel's forehead gently.

"Not too bad," he says. "I'll take some porous water to clean it up, but that can't be helped. This is a bad business. Not the cut on his head. The whole position, I mean. We can't have private wars and do our jobs properly."

His voice has an odd kind of ring to it, coming through your helmet, as though he's a long way away and weak and trembly. Lesson slips his helmet off and goes over to the water canister. He dips a cup into it and fetches it back. All three of them get to work on Schnabel. You don't know what to do.

Then it comes to you. Somebody's got to do it. You might as well.

You edge over to the air-lock and quietly open the inner door. They don't look up as you go in and close the door behind you. Within seconds you are out of the dome again.

Bending down and searching the ground carefully, you find what you are after. Something that you might have seen on the way back from the sarvey if you hadn't been so engrossed with philosophy. Near the door the moon dust has been disturbed. A lot of it is just chaotic scabbings where everybody's feet have been, but there is one track leading out of the mess that leads in a new direction. Up to the rocks, but not towards the space ship. You follow it.

It's only when you come to the base of the rocks that you realise it is not going to be as simple as you thought. The trail just peters out and for the life of you, you don't know where to go.

So you sit down and think it out. You put yourself in Clavier's position. Try to be Clavier. What is a chap like that likely to do? He's upset, naturally, with the business of hitting Schabel. And at being insulted. But the dominant idea in his mind will be that he's let the side down, or whatever the Continental equivalent of "not cricket" is. In that case, he's likely just to go on walking, moving away from the dome and the ship. Not really knowing what he's doing or where he's going.

And men who do that usually move in a straight line, or pretty nearly. It's only when a person is trying to go straight that they get off trail.

So you get up and start climbing, not worrying about whether you are on course, just moving forward and up, hand over hand, foot after foot. It's quite pleasant in a way. You realise you must have a mountain-climbing streak in your nature. Something that you'd never discovered before. You had to come all the way to the Moon to find out.

But then after a bit, it isn't so pleasant. You are getting

quite high up and the exertion is telling on you. You begin to wish that you'd let Clavier find his own way back.

And then you see him. Obviously he's found the climb a bit arduous, too. He's sitting dejectedly on a stump of rock with his helmet in his hands, the nearest he can get to cupping his chin, you suppose.

You come up behind him and while still some distance away you speak to him.

"Hullo, Clavier. Having a quiet think?"

He spins round as if you've threatened to clout him with a rock. Then he jumps to his feet, soles a couple of feet into the air and lands in a sprawling position that can't be doing any good to his dignity. He stands up and faces you.

"Why did you come after me? I will not go back. Not even for you, Mike, will I go back!"

"Take it easy," you say. "If you don't want to go back, then don't. Why should I worry?"

He slumps down again and looks up at you. "I'm sorry, Mike. My nerves, you know, they are not so well. That pig of a Schnabel—"

He suddenly stops and you know what's going through his mind. "It's all right, Clavier," you tell him. "They can't hear you. Everyone's in the dome, with their helmets off."

"All right, then. That pig of a Schnabel, he comes down soon after you leave—oh, yes, I saw you go. I was not asleep! He comes down and he starts on me as soon as he enters the dome. First the air is stuffy. It is not good air. There is not enough of oxygen and too much of carbon dioxide. Then the apparatus—my apparatus is not working properly. Not efficient. It needs a technologist."

Clavier is working himself up again. You try to calm him down but it doesn't do much good.

"He goes over to my apparatus," he goes on. "I tell him not to touch it. He touches it. He tries to alter the settings. I get up and go over to him, trying to convince him, Mike, that I know the best settings—after all, it is the problem I have studied most of all. Then he insults me.

Says I am not a good chemist, not a chemist at all. That the trip would have been better without me. Mike, I could not help myself. I strike him. Hard. He falls to the ground. I come away and climb the rocks. Now I think that perhaps he was right. The trip may have been better without me."

"Tripe," you say, "Utter tripe. God, man, what the devil would we do for air if you weren't here? You don't think that fool of a technologist could do it, do you? Be a little realistic, Clavier. And don't let him get at you. That's what he's after. To get you annoyed. Don't let him."

Clavier chuckles, and it does you good to hear it. "Whatever he was after, he got something else!"

"Sure he did, and serve him right but—I wouldn't do it again unless it's really necessary. It takes a lot of water to bathe his wounds!"

Clavier jumps up. "Water! My water! They are using my water to wash that pig of a Schnabel?"

"Now calm down, Clavier. What else should they do? Let him bleed to death or get impetigo or something?"

Clavier stares at you with round eyes. "Impetigo? Could he really get that, Mike? Just from a little cut like that?"

Crazy as it is, this seems to be the way to handle it. "You never know, Clavier. Little cuts lead to serious things sometimes. Impetigo, asthma, pyorrhea—anything."

He claps your shoulder with a heavy glove. "Mike, I will do it no more. It is too serious!"

"Okay, then. Let's get back. I'd like some food. How about you?"

"I'm starving," he admits.

You lead him back down the rocks to the plain. Then across the plain to the dome. You hope everything's going to be all right. Schnabel might want to get a bit of return for that cut head.

But once inside the dome, you see that it isn't so. Whereas the other three are standing around sipping tea and munching food, the technologist is sitting by himself in a corner,

back to everybody, reading. Although he must know who it is coming in, he doesn't look up.

"Don't provoke him," you say to Clavier before he gets his helmet off. "Just ignore him. Have some tea and tucker."

Clavier sends Schnabel one short glance and then does as you say. Reina has already poured out two more cups and arranged more sandwiches on a plate. You're pleased you've been able to bring some bread up in air-tight containers; bread that's been sterilised by electron bolts.

You lay your own helmet down on the floor and tuck into the sandwiches. The tea is hot and strong, just the way you like it. Maybe it was a good idea bringing Reina—apart from her just being Reina.

"We'll have a better meal soon," she says. "As soon as everything's organised. I hope you'll all be prepared to eat three meals a day at set times. That'll help the rationing scheme and divide the day for us."

"So," says Lesson, with a sly glance at Reina. "So, we're going to have a woman nagging us, even on the Moon!"

Reina turns her nose up at him and calls across to the reading Schnabel.

"Would you like some tea? And some sandwiches, Schnabel?"

The man's head shakes twice. "No, thank you."

"You'll be hungry soon, and then there won't be any left."

"No, thank you!"

Reina gives up. She looks at the rest of you and shrugs. She begins to clear away. Atah looks across to Schnabel and coughs.

"When d'you intend to get back to the air-lock, Schnabel? That's your priority number one. And you ought to start teaching these others to use the mining apparatus."

Everyone except Atah looks deep into their teacups, or suddenly finds something of absorbing interest in their sand-

wishes. You know this isn't going to be nice—especially for Atah.

Schnabel grants and answers without looking up. "I work on the air-lock no more. Such treatment as I get here does not please me. They can learn about mining themselves. I am staying here."

"You'll be here a long time, Schnabel," Atah points out. "None of us can leave here until that lock is repaired."

"I know that. Perhaps, later, I will decide to do it. Not now. I wish to read."

"There's not a lot of time," Atah explains. "It's a long job."

"Do it yourselves, then," Schnabel snaps. "No one is stopping you. You can repair it and dig as much as you wish. My equipment is at your disposal."

Atah remains silent for a moment. You sneak a quick glance across and see that Schnabel has not moved. He still has his back to the company. You look at the others. Reina is fuming inwardly. So is Leeson. Clavier is at least preserving an exterior of other-worldliness.

"Very well, we will do that," Atah says at last. He swings round. "Will you three give me a hand? Reina'd better stay here and watch the electrolysis gear. You know how to work it?"

"Sure I do," Reina replies. "But I'd rather come with you." She sends a meaning glance towards Schnabel.

"I know. But here's where you must give way to men," Atah says gently. "I don't think you'd be as useful as the others."

"All right. But I think we ought to take shifts."

"Maybe we'll do that later. For the moment we must get all the heavy work done. Let's go."

The four of you climb into your suits. It seems to you that you've done nothing but climb into and out of space suits ever since you landed on the Moon. And this won't be the last time, you reckon.

As you go through the air-lock, Reina glances regretfully

at the suit on her bunk, shrugs and turns away. You're glad she's able to see reason. So many women you've known aren't like that.

Outside the dome you go over Schnabel's equipment. He seems to have left a good deal of it up by the rocket. But the small reactor from the second trailer rocket is still here.

"That reactor had better be taken up," Atah says. "We'll be needing power."

You and Lenson grab the nuclear reactor and start up the rocks with it, followed by Atah and Clavier bearing the smaller items. It's not so easy getting the reactor up the rock-face, but herculean effort on Lenson's part helps a lot. After a good deal of mild cursing you arrive at the ship with it.

"Good show," Atah commends. "That's a big job done. Doesn't look much, perhaps, but power is essential and you've supplied it."

Okay, you think, okay. Now let's get cracking on that door. Closer examination shows that a jagged rock point must have closted the air-lock because there's a sharp indentation in the outer door. Then it must have taken a whack from a blunt prominence which buckled the whole thing, ripped it in places and tore it away from the valves. To you, it looks hopeless. Not so to Atah.

He stands back and gives the door a long stare, thumping it once or twice with his gloved hand before turning to face the rest of you.

"Not so bad, really, you know. Shouldn't take as long as I thought. I expect Schnabel realized that. I suggest we take the door right off."

You don't argue. You don't know anything about it. But you can't help wondering what Schnabel was doing up here while you were all resting. Nothing seems to have been accomplished.

Anyway you take the job assigned to you and plug the grinder into the reactor. Then you bring the revolving head up to the rivets and grind them down flat. It's not quite as

easy as it sounds, but it's not too tough. You're fascinated by the way the metal filings drift down like dust, slowly and straight, with no air currents to waft them back and forth.

Once you've got a little way down the door and levelled off about ten rivets, Leeson comes along with a little pile-driver and punches the body of them out. Atah has gone inside to do a bit more inspecting, while Clavier keeps a wary eye on the reactor. The whole thing becomes very monotonous.

And it goes on for quite a while. After a bit, Leeson and Clavier change places. You wonder if Leeson knows anything about reactors. If he does, it looks as though you are the only person on this trip who doesn't know any science stuff. Guess that's why you're the labourer.

But you don't mind, really. It's almost uncanny how you can do all this grinding, and Clavier keep up a constant crash-crash with the pile-driver, and yet not a sound comes to you. Labouring is much more pleasant in silence, you decide.

At length, all the rivets are down and all the bodies punched out. The door is free. You call a warning to Atah over the radio and stand back. The door tumbles forward and slams down onto the rocky edge of the crevice. In fact, it practically falls into the crevice, but Leeson jumps forward and grabs it. On Earth he'd never have made it, but here the door weighs so little that he is easily able to swing it round away from the yawning gap.

Atah has been doing things to the inside of the valves. Now he steps out with a grin. "Things are going fine," he announces. "Just a little more work on those valves and they'll be functioning as before. Can you straighten out the door?"

You don't know. You've never done anything like it before. But you nod and say something encouraging. You can't imagine anyone telling Atah that a thing like straightening out a door couldn't be done—except perhaps if that anyone was Schnabel.

"Right, then," says Atah. "Clavier, will you give me a hand on these valves?"

Lesson and you look at each other then at the door. Luckily the pile-driver has an attachment that's fairly blunt. You reckon it'll go quite a long way towards ironing out the bumps.

Then you don't reckon any more. You just stand stock still for a fraction of a second. Then you turn and scramble off down the crevice towards the plain, moving with much less than recommended care.

But how can you take care when your head is still ringing with Reina's screams that came over the radio.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Sentence

It's not as though Reina is the kind of girl who will scream at seeing a mouse or an earwig—even if such things existed on the Moon. When Reina screams, you can pretty well be sure it's something more serious than attention-getting. And you've a pretty good idea of what it is in this case.

You can hear Atah calling to you over the radio, telling you to be more careful, not to take such leaps, not to take such chances. You know they are all coming down after you, ignoring the air-lock for now. But this is one time when you don't want Atah's advice, one time when you're not going to take it. You gonna be'll understand.

All the while you are clambering over the rocky ledges, with criminal disregard for the space suit's safety, there is one dominant thought in your mind. Reina's voice came over the radio, must have come through the mask in her space helmet. Could she have been wearing it? No. Not when she'd been told to stay in the dome and watch the electrolysis gear. In that case, her head must have been near the helmet when she screamed. And you can remember quite clearly seeing her helmet lying on her bunk. . . .

You reach the plain a long way ahead of the others and streak across it towards the dome. You come strongly as you wrestle with the valves on the air-lock, wrenching the door open and jumping inside. Almost before it's safe to do so, you swing back the inner door. It's almost all you can do to close it behind you so that the others can get in. Then you turn to face the scene in the dome.

You don't face it very long. Just long enough to take in the situation, to see Reina standing by her bunk with a sumpcan in her hand, to see Schmalz facing her and about

to lunge forward, his face streaked with red veins. Then you lunge forward yourself.

Schnabel had swung round a little at your entrance. That way, you catch him off balance. Your shoulder sends him crashing down on to a bunk and you fall on top of him, pounding at his face and body. In a way it's unfair on him, your having a space helmet on. He can't do a thing to your face. There's just no way he can knock you out. He just has to lie there and take a pasting.

While you're doing it, you can imagine the prelude. The things that led up to Reina screaming into her helmet. And the imaginings help you to put more weight behind your punches. You even start to take pleasure in thrashing him, getting your own back indirectly for all the insults and selfishness the man has been throwing around since the trip started.

Then you find yourself being pulled away from him. Atah's voice comes across, still calm and quite mild. "Better ease up now, Mike. Guess he's had enough."

When you stand back, you see he's right. Schnabel doesn't get up. He just stays on the bunk and groans. And the groans swell in intensity every time he makes a movement. You reckon you've made a good job of it.

By this time most of the others have their suits off. You and Atah do the same. You catch Reina's eye. It has a gleam in it that makes your pulse pound. It might be the exertion, but you don't think so. That gleam tells you a lot you wanted to know.

Atah is standing over Schnabel, who has rolled over on to his back and is staring at the roof, gritting his teeth against the groans that outrage his dignity.

"Well, Schnabel, you had that coming, I'm afraid," Atah says. "Your behaviour hasn't been all that co-operative, you'll admit. And this last episode with Reina was the last straw. I only hope you've learned a lesson of some kind. If you're prepared to forget everything and start being properly human again, I guess we could arrange to forget it

too." He sends a glance to Reina and you. You both nod. Heck, you don't want any wars going on!

"What d'you say then, Schnabel?" Atah concludes.

But the technologist just stares at the roof and remains silent. His face is beginning to swell. His muscles must feel like toasted fish rots. In a way, you can imagine he finds it difficult to forget.

"All right," Atah says. He has no mercy for the technologist now. "You remember the agreement you signed before the trip, Schnabel? You remember the clauses in it? That wasn't a Civil Agreement, Schnabel—remember? There was too much State backing for this trip to run the risk of having men turn out like you. But you seem to have forgotten the penalties. When you get back to Earth, Schnabel, you will be hanged. That is the penalty for deliberately endangering the lives of this party. And you are going to pay that penalty if I have to carry you back to Earth in my arms."

Atah's voice is quiet and undramatic. For all that, the dreadful irrevocability of it strikes through all of you. You can see that on their faces. But Schnabel's face is in no condition for the niceties of expression. It's almost as though he hasn't heard.

But he must have done. He must have heard the words, the sentence. Because it was a sentence, really Schnabel is as good as dead now.

Atah turns away from the man and faces you all. "Well, now. What about some more tea, Reina?"

Just like that. And you can see he's right. There's no sense in making a great issue of it—especially when you all have to stay in the same dome with the condemned man. Best thing is to forget all about it until you get back to Earth. Or at least, to try and forget all about it.

"Okay," Reina says, catching on as quickly as usual.

"It'll be ready in a moment."

Nobody asks her what Schnabel did, and she doesn't try to ask you. But you're going to find out sometime, you

pass. After all, what you gave him might not have been enough. Although what he's going to get probably will be.

Then, as Reina prepares the meal and the others flop down on their bunks, removing their outer suits, the thought strikes you. This capital punishment business will break out all over again when this affair comes to a head on Earth. Some will say it's a good thing. Others will point out that it didn't make any apparent difference to Schnabel's behaviour and that now the behaviour is over and done with, why waste a good technologist who's had Moon experience?

And the whole sordid thing will be related always to the first Moon trip. Something that should go down in the archives as a great and important conquest will be remembered as the affair which brought capital punishment into the news again. For that's the way people's minds work. Always have.

And all because of Schnabel. You wonder if Atah Kark has thought of that angle yet.

Maybe he has, maybe he hasn't. Possibly it doesn't make much difference either way. He's had enough setbacks already. One more won't affect him a great deal. Besides, he has got to the Moon.

Reina doesn't take long about the tea, and you are soon all sitting round as before, only this time Schnabel is still flat out on his bunk. Considering the situation, the conversation is not too bad, not too stilted, not too forced.

"What d'you think of the set-up?" Larson asks Atah. "D'you think we're on schedule?"

"We haven't done so badly," Atah says. "This dome was a big point—and its air supply, of course. The next chaps up here will have that laid on. The two main problems now are the air-lock and the return fuel. The first, I think we can handle in time. The second, I'm not so sure about. I'd be much happier if we could find a reservoir."

"The electrolysis, it is not efficient?" Clavier asks. He sounds almost hurt.

Atah tries to mollify him. "It's wonderfully efficient,

Clavier. You did a magnificent job there. We've got good air unlimited and the carbon dioxide concentration is suitably low. But the hydrogen output is low too. Not your fault. You can't get more out of the snow than is in there. At this rate it will take thirty weeks to make enough to get back. I don't want to stay that long. I don't think we could stand it, temperamentally."

"I guess you're not so far wrong there, Atah," Lesson puts in. He glances across at Schnabel. "Things could get a lot worse than they are in thirty weeks. We've only been here a day or so and look at the situation!"

"Don't let's dramatize it," you say. "I'd say things are pretty well under control now. I don't see how they could get much worse. Not that they're all that bad now." You glance quickly at Reira. She looks away, but not quickly enough.

"You're right," Atah agrees. "We don't want to dramatize it. But we must be prepared. In any case, I'd like to get away from here in a week or two at the most. The next trip can be for longer. There's a lot of work to be done on the data we've collected."

"You mean we've done our job?" Lesson asks in a surprised tone.

"No, no," Atah puts in quickly. "But we will have done in a week or two. It shouldn't take longer than that. After all, the main thing was to get here. True a little self-science would be a good thing to take back with us. But only a little. We mustn't try to do the job of half a dozen expeditions."

"That's just because you'll probably be on them all," Lesson counters with a grin. "This may be the only trip for us. There are plenty more wanting to take our place."

"That's as it should be. We don't want only a handful of men with Moon experience. The more the better. In fact, I doubt if I'll come on the next one. There are plenty to take my place, too, you know."

Personally, you doubt it. Oh, there are plenty who'd like

to take Atah's place. But very few of them could do so with the same efficiency, with the same calm grip of things. No, you reckon Atah ought to be on that next Moon trip. For yourself, you're not so sure. You've got other ideas of how to spend your life. Ideas that somehow get mixed up with Reima. You reckon you could spend a year or two writing things about this trip and the Moon in general. That would be enough for you.

"What about you, Reima," you say. "You haven't said anything."

"Oh, I don't know," she replies. "I guess I'll have had enough in a couple of weeks. I'll confess that when we worked it out at thirty, I was a little scared. I didn't intend to be up here that long."

Maybe there's a look in her eyes, maybe there isn't. You imagine you see one anyway. And anyway, you imagine it's connected with those ideas of yours. You could be wrong. It's going to hurt if you are.

"If we are honest, that probably goes for all of us," Clavier says. "I, too, was a little scared when we worked it out at thirty weeks. But now there is a chance of leaving earlier, I think we ought to take it. I will start right now to look for a reservoir."

He gets up and reaches for his suit. Atah laughs and calls to him.

"Hold it, Clavier. You don't have to start digging this very minute. It wouldn't do much good if you did. How'd you know where to dig?"

"Where to dig? Why anywhere. I would keep digging until I found the reservoir."

"Keep digging in one place?" Atah says with a slight smile.

"Why no," the chemist explains eagerly. "After digging a little way and not finding a reservoir of hydrogen, I should start somewhere else. And so on until I did find one."

"And how far would you dig before giving up? And where would you go next? The Moon's a pretty big thing,

you know. By the time you'd found one that way, we'd probably have enough from the electrolysis anyway. In other words, it would take you all of thirty weeks!"

You all laugh. Even Clavier joins in. "Of course, of course," he says. "I am a fool, a veritable fool."

"I wouldn't go so far as that," Arab says kindly. "But you need to know a bit more about mining before you start your digging."

"Very well, you tell me, I learn. And then—I dig."

Arab goes over to the few selected books you brought on the trip. Textbooks, mostly. Tomes of reference that might or should have some bearing on the problems you're likely to come up against. He chooses a volume and brings it back.

"Read this," Arab says. "Skim most of it. Just take in the details of geodesic diagnosis so you'll know what it's all about. Then go on to the part dealing with actual mining procedure. You've got the latest dope on nuclear digging there."

"Hey! Why should Clavier do all that? He did the electrolysis, now he wants the glory of mining a reservoir!" Leeson says it jokingly, but there's a grain of seriousness in it.

The pilot must feel that he's cut out for better things than just lugging mattresses about and straightening out doors.

"All right," Arab laughs. "Both of you read it. Make the finding of the reservoir a joint effort. Mike and I will work on the air-lock. You'll also have to get the details of the mining for the records, Mike."

"I know," you say. "I know. I'll spend my time vacillating between the rocket up there and Clavier's beer down here. If I get giddy, Reina will have to pull me round."

"Which is a very small job for so capable a woman," Reina says. "I want to do something better than that. You've all been allotting yourself little bits of glory. Now how about some for me?"

Here again there's a grain of seriousness beneath the banter. And you love her for it.

"H'm," says Atah. "Wouldn't it be good enough for you to be just a kind of handywoman, lending your excellent services wherever needed?"

"That would be just fine! Then, when my children ask me what I did on the Moon, I shall be able to tell them that I was a handywoman. Pull out my chest and tell that I lent excellent service where necessary. Holding a hammer here, carrying a cadmium rod there."

"Well," begins Atah, with one of his rare flashes of wit, "if I'd known you'd got some children, I'd never have let you come. How many, by the way?"

Reina's caught off guard and blushes. She looks wonderful. "Never mind the jokes," she laughs. "What am I going to do?"

"I have it!" Clavier exclaims. "A beautiful job. And very important. The compressor, he is pumping the hydrogen into a small tank. What we need now is a pipe running from the compressor to the fuel tank in the rocket up there. Reina can build it! Hoy, hoy!"

For a moment everyone is rather taken aback by his enthusiasm and his terminal ejaculation. Then it sinks in. He wants Reina to fix up a pipe so that the compressor can pump the separated and liquefied hydrogen straight into the rocket's fuel tank.

"Can you do that, Reina?" Atah asks, giving her a tilt-headed look.

"I—I don't know. But if Clavier tells me how, I'll have a jolly good try."

"It sounds a good idea. Go ahead with it," says Atah.

"Right away?" Clavier asks excitedly. He's ready to go.

"No," Atah says. "Not right away. I suggest we all have a few hours' sleep again. We've got to keep an eye on our rest, you know. There's no sense in tiring ourselves out."

The rest of you except Clavier agree, and the general

approbation soon silences his objections. He compromises by taking the mining book to bed with him.

You all lay down on your bunks, loosening your clothing and letting your bodies sink down into the soft material of the mattresses. By common consent, there's no talking any more.

You lie there for a while, thinking, occasionally sending a furtive glance across at Reina, who is barely visible in the dimness, and wondering what the heck you're doing on the Moon, and after a while you fall asleep.

Something wakes you. For some time you don't know what it is. You lie on your mattress, breathing hard, and staring into the dimness around you. Then you look across at the electrolysis tank. The sight of it sends quivers of fear through you and you realize why you're breathing hard.

There aren't any bubbles of oxygen coming from the tank.

CHAPTER NINE

Ambush

It doesn't make sense to begin with. As you get off the bunk and stagger over to the electrolysis tank to take a better, but still busy, look, you keep remembering that everything was all right when you went to sleep. The air was good—Atah had remarked on it—and the bubbles were coming up nicely. Now there is no water in the tank and no bubbles of life-giving oxygen.

You swing your head round crazily and stare at the carbon dioxide extractor. That isn't working, either. The atmosphere must be choked with the respiratory product.

Suddenly the vagueness clears away as you realise how poisonous carbon dioxide is. You take a befuddled stride across the dome and drag the space suit on to yourself.

With the helmet in place and the valve on, you start to feel a little better. But you don't sit and congratulate yourself. Instead, you spring across the dome and shake the others. When you have stirred them all up, you come back to Reina and force her into a suit. You look round and find the others have followed your example, swiftly realising that something's wrong with the air.

Only when Reina's helmet is securely on her head do you flop down on the bunk and start to think. And then it comes home to you with a wham.

You went around shaking them all into wakefulness. But you didn't do it to Schnabel. Because Schnabel wasn't there.

Atah has been examining the tank, with Lesson and Clavier clustered round him. He looks up with a frown plainly visible through his helmet.

"This couldn't have happened on its own, could it, Clavier?"

"But no, No!" the chemist exclaims. "It would be impossible. Someone has——"

He breaks off and looks towards Schnabel's bunk, his eyes wide, his mouth open.

"You're right," you say. "Schnabel did it, I'm sure of it. He thought we'd go under. Then he could go back to Earth alone with a trumped-up story—and not be hanged."

"The man must be mad," Leeson says. "He'd never be able to handle the ship alone. He's not a pilot—and even I could not do it."

"Maybe he's mad at that," Atah sighs in a tired voice.

"Mad enough to kill us all so that he could escape. Well, we can't do any more to him than we could before. He hasn't worsened his position any."

"Mike!" Reins's voice cuts through the radio at full intensity. "Mike, look. He's taken the oxygen bottles!"

Following her pointing finger, you see she's right. The wall rack that should hold spare bottles for the suits is empty. So Schnabel anticipated that you might wake up.

The others take a look, too. And one by one their faces freeze.

"That gives us about eight hours to live—unless we do something about it," Atah announces. "I think we'd better make an inspection."

"If he has ruined my apparatus, I will kill him," Clavier says slowly.

As Atah moves over to the air-lock, he looks back at the chemist. "I must admit you'd have some excuse," he says. And then, with Leeson, he passes through.

You let Clavier go next as he is so anxious about his gear. When he has gone, you and Reins go into the lock. Before opening the outer door, you give her a smile and gently squeeze her gloved hand. She smiles back at you and

relieves the pressure. Then you are out on the Moon again.

Even before you get out, your helmet is full of Clavier's continental epithets, describing clearly and with emphasis a whole range of animals and their habits. You guess he's seen the damage done to his apparatus. And you find you are right.

"The pig has bored a hole in the supply tube," Clavier explains, almost with tears in his eyes. "Also, the viper has done things to my generator. It will take hours and hours to repair. I will kill him!"

"You'll probably find it difficult," Atah says. "No doubt he's got his radio on and can hear every word we say. He won't be back, I'm thinking."

You've got your own ideas about that. If he doesn't come back, then he's got even less time to live than you have, there's less oxygen in his suit because of the time he spent working on the air-lock while you were all sleeping. But then you remember the spare bottles. He must have about a hundred and fifty hours' supply in them. Even so, that's still only a hundred and fifty hours. And Schnabel didn't seem the kind of man who would go away and die so easily. You guess he'll be back if he gets the chance. And you're half inclined to give him the chance, just so that you can get your hands on him.

But there is no time for such thoughts. In fact, your time for any kind of thought is running out fast. That makes you think of Reina. And she makes you think of the generator.

"You'd better take command, Clavier," Atah says. "Just tell us what you want done. We'll do whatever you say, only let's be quick about it."

"That is kind," the chemist returns. "Well, suppose you and Reina work on the supply tube? You can replace it with the pipe that Reina would have used for the line to the fuel tank. That will have to wait; it will be quicker than trying to repair this hole. Mike and Larson can help me with the generator."

You and the pilot are only too willing to do that. As Atah and Reina go off to see about the pipe, you both set to work under Clavier's guidance. His words are quick and sharp. Direct and to the point. There is never any fumbling for the right term or the correct adjective. He is more like a surgeon than a chemist—never looking up from his busy hands, just asking for things and telling you what to do and how to do it even while he's doing something intricate himself. It's a wonder to you how he manages such delicate work with the space suit gloves on.

He must know the generator inside out and several other contrivances, too, for you can see that he tackles each problem in just the right order to get the whole thing done in the minimum of time—with no retraced steps, or premature solderings. This is just one more thing that increases your admiration for Clavier. You begin to realize what the trip would have been like without him.

While you're working, you try to forget that somewhere inside the dome a clock is ticking. Try to forget that as the Earth above you slowly turns, so the available hours are passing. It doesn't do your work any good to remember things like that.

The generator is obviously the biggest problem, for although there are three of you working on it, and only two on the pipe-line, Atah and Reina finish their task long before the generator is repaired. They come and lend four more hands to the job.

But it still takes a long time. These nuclear generators are so very tiny that every inch of space is crammed with intricate mechanisms. The three or four blows that Schraibel must have given it, certainly did a whole lot of damage. You're just thankful that Clavier's around. Otherwise the damage would probably be permanent.

At length, Clavier gives a grunt and squats back on his haunches, being careful not to touch the seat of his suit on the scorching lunar surface. It wasn't hot to take temperatures like that.

"Gentlemen," he announces. "I think it is done."

You glance down at your oxygen gauge and reckon it's just about in time. Another hour and—but there's no need to think of that. Not now, you hope.

"If some of you will go and fetch more snow, the rest of us can go inside and see if it is all right," Clavier adds.

That broken pipe had let all the water out of the outside tank, down onto the surface to be vaporised and lost forever as the molecules attained escape velocity and shot off into space. The outside tank is now empty.

"What about it, Reina?" you ask. "Shall we get the snow?"

"Sure," she says, and before anyone can raise an objection, she darts off to get the bags, unceremoniously tipping Atah's specimens onto the ground.

Lesson gives you a grin. You don't know whether it's because of the specimens or because Reina is coming with you. It doesn't matter which it is. Lesson is all right.

"Quick as you can then," Clavier instructs, as the rest of them move off towards the air-lock on the dome. "Don't linger more than is necessary."

What did he mean by that, you think. Maybe you're imagining things.

But you are certainly not imagining Reina's hand in yours as you both start out for the rocks, swinging your bags jauntily. Life seems suddenly sure again. She looks up at you and smiles. The kind of smile that sends a little beating pulse to your temple.

You curse this radio business. It's quite certain that the others won't have taken their helmets off yet, because the air supply isn't functioning. And there's so much you want to say to Reina. You've never courted in so much silence before. But you make out pretty well all the same.

It doesn't take long to get down into the crevice and to fill the bags with snow, packing it down tightly so's to get a

maximum load. Every now and then while you're doing it, you look at Reina.

On the way back, still hand in hand with the bags over your shoulders, Reina looks up at the speckled starburst in the sky. She makes you stand still a moment and look too.

"You know," she says, not caring whether the others hear. "With those stars spread out up there, it's almost as if we are angels and the Moon is heaven."

And as she says it she pressed your fingers inside their thick glove. It doesn't matter about the air-lock. The generator is unimportant. And Schnabel is just a horrible nightmare that doesn't mean a thing in reality. For you, for a moment at least, the Moon is heaven.

And then it's time to start thinking about the dome and the lack of air inside it. Already the voice of Clavier is coming over the radio, murmuring impatience with you both.

You tighten your grip on Reina's hand and make her run towards the dome. At the tank, you stop and tip the snow from the bags. It melts as soon as it touches the metal, which is kept at just the right temperature by Clavier's ingenious method of partially shielding the sun's rays.

"Water should be coming through any moment now," you say into the radio. "We'll stay out here until we hear from you."

And while you are waiting, you turn and look at Reina. You stand very close together. As close as the suits permit. Even inside her helmet her hair flames and gleams. You want to run your fingers through it, to feel the texture of it.

Then Clavier's voice jumps you and you spring apart. It seems so near.

"Hillo," Clavier says. "Will you increase the power about two notches?"

"Okay," you reply. "Wait a bit."

By now you know quite a bit about the workings of the generator. It's a fairly simple matter to step up the power output.

"How's that?" you ask.

"Just a little more—hold it! Right. I think that will do. She is working beautifully again. You can come in now."

You don't want to but you must. It'd just seem damned silly if you both stayed out on the Moon when there's warmth, air and food inside the dome. But somehow these things don't seem as attractive as they did a while back.

Even so, you lead her to the dome. As the outer door swings back, you send a casual glance towards the generator. It seems to be all right. Your eyes move up to the sky, down to the rocks—and you catch a hint of movement in between two of the lower ones.

It doesn't take long for you to realize what that movement is caused by. Even if the Moon isn't heaven, fate couldn't be playing into your hands better than this.

You give Reina a gentle push into the lock and say: "I'm for a cup of hot tea and an hour's rest on a nice soft mattress. No reading, no talking. Just sleeping."

But she looks mightily surprised when you stay outside and close the door on her, motioning for silence with your other hand. Just as the door closes, you see her surprised expression change to one of near-understanding. Another moment or two, you reckon, and she'll have sized it up. Good girl.

Then you drop down behind a pile of equipment and lie in wait for Schnabel.

Reina must have done a pretty quick job of letting the others know what's happening, for within a moment or two Clavier's voice ceases and Atah's take over.

"Okay, Mike. That was a fine job you did. Now you can take the rest you wanted. Here, have a cup of tea."

Good old Atah. That way, Schnabel will think you're in the dome with the others. He's going to get a surprise.

"Can't we take our helmets off now?" says Reina. "The air's all right, isn't it?"

"Sure it is," Atah replies. "Besides, how can Mike drink his tea through his helmet!"

There is a general outburst of laughter that quickly fades away as they take off their helmets. Then a deep silence comes down. You switch off your microphone in case Schnabel should hear your breathing. He's no fool.

And that thought is not very comforting. You played the hero all right by staying out here and waiting for him. But what are you going to do when you get him? He's not a moon who can be tracked down with ease. This is going to be difficult. It might even get rough.

You try not to think about that. There's not much to choose between Schnabel and you where weight is concerned. This affair is pretty certain to come to a fight. And he'll probably lead you up among the rocks before starting to take the offensive. And there are some nice deep fissures up there to be thrown down. Fissures that would be a heck of a job to get out of.

Another factor is that you've only got a little less than an hour's supply of oxygen on your suit. You've got to be back inside the dome by then.

You begin to get a little cramped, sitting on your haunches, trying not to make the slightest movement in case Schnabel gets warned off. Stealthily you stretch out one leg, pull it back and stretch the other, under cover of the equipment. That technologist is being very fly. He's waiting a long time for the all clear.

And then you start to wondering whether you imagined the movement. It might be. These lights and darks can play tricks with eyes used to an infinite number of halftones. It may well be that the hint of movement you saw was just caused by a current of air sweeping up from your mouth over the helmet's glass front—or something like that. Maybe you are just being a fool, sitting out here while the others sip hot tea. The thought of it makes your mouth unnaturally dry. You'd give a lot for a cup of tea now.

You'd almost give Schnabel. In fact, you think you'll call it a day and put up with the cold ridicule from the others when you go in empty-handed and unaccomplished.

But just as you are going to rise, someone else rises over among the rocks. A space-suited figure. And it can't be anyone else but Schnabel. He comes forward, instinctively crouching, making his way towards the generator. You let him get within a hundred yards of it. Then you stand up and rush him.

CHAPTER TEN

Knave of Diamonds

The moment you start moving you realise you did it too soon. Schnabel has been keeping his eye on the dome even as he sidled up to the generator. He sees you as soon as you make the first move. And, as you'd expected, he turns and flees towards the rocks.

Well, it just means that he's got a little more lead than you'd wanted him to have. Otherwise the position is not much worse than it could ever be.

You watch his feet, trying to calculate his stride. It's a big one and it carries him across the plain at about eight or nine miles an hour. His leg muscles are pretty powerful.

But then so are yours. In fact, you make them so and force them to fling your feet against the ground so that your own great leaping strides are bigger than Schnabel's. Gradually you gain on him.

Even so, it's too gradual. Before you are within fifty feet of him, he has reached the rocks and with one tremendous bound, soars up several dozen feet and lands on a ledge. He throws one quick glance behind him, sees you about to jump too, and sets off higher and higher.

This is the worst stage almost. Here you have so many factors. You've got to watch out that the rocks don't tear your suit. You've got to be careful not to smash your helmet against a sharp point, for the plastic probably wouldn't be able to withstand that. And you've got to keep an eye on Schnabel so that you don't lose him, and so that he doesn't spring out on you as you round a boulder.

Higher and higher you climb, until the plain and the dome

are part of another world, a model world laid out on the floor. You know that if you switched on the radio and called for help, they would all come running. But somehow you look upon this as your own job. Something you've got to do alone. There's no reason for it. You just feel it that way.

Then suddenly, you come up on a fairly wide ledge. Schnabel is standing on it, his back to the rising cliff behind him, a small boulder in an upraised hand.

"Don't come any farther, Mike," he says over the radio. "This little stone would make a pretty hole in your helmet."

You rather doubt it, but you don't want to make the experiment just yet. So you switch on the microphone and talk to him.

"You'd do that to me, would you, Schnabel?"

He laughs unpleasantly. "With pleasure, Mike. I still have one or two aches and pains that were caused by you. I should enjoy killing you."

A question comes into your mind. You voice it. "Then why the hell don't you do it?"

"Because, Mister Reporter, I want you to know a few things before you die. I shall get even more enjoyment from that!"

Same old stuff, you think. The killer must tell his victim what a great and clever guy he is. All part of the megalomania, you suppose. And in the way that such things work out, a part of your mind goes wandering off on a line of its own. It starts mulling round the old theory of yours that psychological states are inherited according to the rules of continuous variation. Just as there are infinite degrees of height between the two extremes, so there are infinite degrees of manias, phobias and complexes. And just as some people grow taller after they should have reached their own particular maximum, so some people take on psychological growths after they should have reached mental maturity.

But all that's got nothing to do with the matter in hand, and you'd be the first to deplore it. So you listen to Schnabel and all the while you are sizing up the situation, wondering how you are going to take the offensive and put a stop to this houlder-burling business.

"Yes, you are going to die," Schnabel says. "It's true that we all are sometime, but you will die very soon now. I just wanted you to know that I have tricked everybody on this trip—you, even the indomitable Atah Hark. You see, Mike, I did not come here just to be part of an historic experiment. Man's conquest of space does not interest me—except as an opportunity to make myself independent for the rest of my life."

You wonder what the blazes he's getting at, how the hell coming to the Moon can make a man independent. True, you expect to make a little out of your books and articles on the subject, but that wouldn't make you independent for more than a year. Independence for a lifetime means a lot of money.

Schnabel seems to read your thoughts. "You don't know how I can do that? No. Because you and all the others were so fixed with the possibilities of Moon flight in regard to the rest of space that you were blind to the other possibilities. The Moon is full of diamonds, Mike. Look."

He slips his free hand into the suit's wide pocket and fetches out a number of things that gleam brightly in the sunlight. They are diamonds all right. Nothing else could possibly give off such beautiful rays.

"See?" he goes on. "Here is my independence. A fortune in diamonds for me when I return to Earth. That is why I came here, Mike. That is what I was looking for when you all thought I was working on the air-lock and you all took a quiet rest while the queer technologist got on with the work!"

"So?" you say. "And what happens when everybody else comes up here and gets a faithful of diamonds apiece? Won't the diamond market collapse?"

"Of course it will. And a good thing too. These things have far too much value attached to them! But it will be too late to affect me. You see, Mike, I have already contracted with the world's largest diamond concern to deliver these gems. My money is waiting for me. I get it on delivery, and the concern has everything ready for immediate production of these baubles. They will clean up the field some time before the next party gets back from the Moon."

You must admit there's a good deal of sense in what he says. It looks as though the scheme's foolproof. Too bad he won't get away to reap the benefit. Because now more than ever you've no intention of letting him do this thing.

To think that during all the preparations back on Earth, during all the work and trouble and propaganda and setbacks, Schnabel was thinking only of getting a pocketful of diamonds!

"So," he goes on. "You see that you have to die. Also, of course, the others must, too. It's a pity that the lovely Reins must turn into dust here on the Moon. I was thinking of taking her back with me, but of course she would talk. And anyway, I shall not be short of lovely women when I've got my fortune."

You stand there on the ledge and gradually tense yourself for the lunge. You try to look beaten because you are pretty sure that Schnabel can see your face through the helmet. You reckon it'll be any moment from now.

"I suppose you're right," you say. "You seem to have worked it out in detail."

He laughs. "Yes, right down to the last detail, Mike!"

And it's the laugh that's his undoing. Men can't be truly on guard when they are laughing. So as soon as the guffaw starts, you send yourself forward, your legs running down on the rock, your shoulder pointed straight at his chest.

Even so, he's pretty quick. His hand comes down with the boulder and lets it fly. But the angle is wrong. It misses. Just as well, you think.

Then you make contact. Both of you go down onto the rocky ledge. Schnabel is caving and flailing with his arms. He's still got a good grip. In it, you both roll around on the rock, getting near the edge, where a fissure yawns blackly down and down.

You know very well what he's trying to do. That's because his imagination is not working too well. His idea is to get you off the ledge. You could do that to him, of course, but then there'd be no proof that he's dead and out of the way. You reckon there's a much better method of dealing with the redoubtable Schnabel.

You wait your opportunity, just making sure that he doesn't send you down into the abyss. And then it comes. You find your hands free at the same time as you both roll near a jagged rock. You bring your hands up with fingers spread wide. You grasp his helmet tightly. You bring it down with as much force as you can muster onto the jagged rock. It cracks and flies apart.

That's all there is to it. He doesn't take even a minute in dying. The vacuum of space does things to his lungs and eyeballs that don't make for beauty. Compared to this, his previous appearance was one of cupidian charm. You turn away, not because it makes you sick. But because you are tired of it all. Now that it's over, the reaction sets in.

But there's no time to sit and stare at the sky while you get your mind orientated again. There's only a few minutes' oxygen left in your bottle and you've already noticed that Schnabel isn't carrying the spaces. Even if he were, they wouldn't be much good, because you can't change them out in space. For the same reason you can't use the bottle on his space suit. You reckon he must have hidden the spaces up in the rocks somewhere.

However, there'll be time to look for those later if necessary. The great thing now is to get Schnabel's body down to the dome in as short a time as possible.

You pull back to him and lift him up. He is quite light

for so big a man. Of course! It's the Moon's lesser gravity. You seem to be slightly out of touch with things at the moment. Maybe that's because you never killed a man before. . . .

It's a funny thing, but you find yourself being terribly gentle with Schnabel's body as you lower it down the rocks. You know full well that he's dead and that a few knocks won't hurt him. Yet somehow you find it so difficult to let the carcass fall even a few feet while you climb down after it. You have to do so, of course, otherwise you'd never get down, but it sends a queasy feeling of indecency through you.

In fact, you are highly relieved apart from the exertion, when you reach the plain. You don't mind dragging the body because you have the excuse that your helmet is too big to allow him to be thrown over your shoulder. And you're not too keen on having him that near you, anyway.

At the air-lock, you press the button that sounds a buzzer telling you that the inner door is closed. Then you open the outer door and start to drag Schnabel inside. But suddenly you reckon there's no sense in doing that. He might just as well stay out here. You lay him down by the door, in the shade of the equipment. He'll keep quite cool that way.

Then you go into the air-lock and through into the dome. They must have heard the buzz, for they all stand and watch the air-lock expectantly. Even when you've stepped out of it, they continue to stare for a moment or two. Then they turn to you. Atah raises his eyebrows and says something. But you are fiddling with your suit and can't hear him. Leeson comes over and helps you off with it, casting meaning looks at the dust all over it.

When you've got the suit off, a cup of steaming tea comes into view. You take it and flop down onto a bank, giving Reina a grateful glance as you do so. Then you look up at Atah Kark.

"What was that?" you ask. "I didn't hear before."

"I just wanted to know what had happened," Atah

replies, "Reina came in and made elaborate signs for silence, then she wrote down that you'd said something about having tea and a rest yet had stayed outside and cautioned her not to say anything. She told us she reckoned you'd seen Schnabel and were going after him. We rather thought you'd be bringing him back—if you came back."

"I did bring him back," you say. "He's outside. I didn't think you'd want him in here. He's not a pretty sight."

"Alive?" says Leeson.

"Dead," you reply. Leeson looks delighted. Clavier appears disappointed. "There was a fight up in the rocks. He tried to fling me over a precipice. I smashed his helmet on a rock."

You tell it simply, because this is no time for drama. You've had enough of that for quite a while. And the others probably have, too.

Apart from a little gasp that Reina lets out, they remain silent for several minutes. You reckon you know what they are thinking. In their mind's eye they are seeing the pictures that were taken of experimental animals suddenly exposed to the highest vacuum attainable on Earth. A vacuum that's only a small fraction of the one up here. Those pictures were not nice to look at. They weren't meant to be. They were intended as a warning to space travellers as to what happens to an organism under those circumstances. You can see from everybody's faces that they are remembering those pictures.

Well, they're lucky. You don't have to remember them. You've seen the real thing.

"I see," says Atah. "It seems as though the wheels of justice have been anticipated. Maybe we've stopped them turning the wrong way, though."

So he had been thinking about that capital punishment aspect of things. You reckon there are not many aspects that miss Atah.

"Of course, there'll be an enquiry when we get back, but I don't think there'll be much trouble. In fact, I have the military prerogative to execute any of this party that might harm the rest or the project. On this occasion it was delegated to you, Mike. He was under sentence of death, anyway. And then that business of the electrolysis apparatus was enough to take the matter into our own hands."

"And he was after the generator again when I rushed him," you say. "Besides, I killed him in self-defence."

"I'm sure you did, Mike," says Atah. "We're all sure you did, aren't we?"

The rest of them nod and grant agreement. But you can tell that they don't really mean it. At the back of their minds they think you killed Schnabel deliberately. And when you come to think of it, you probably did. At least you set out after him with that idea at the back of your mind. Just because he was struggling with you when it came off doesn't really alter the case.

For a moment you don't know what to think of it. Then you realize that men like Atah and Clavier would not sanction murder, however much they disliked the victim. No, they know that this expedition was not safe while Schnabel was alive. Five lives might have perished for his one. It was most and right that you should kill him. You're going to try and believe that.

Then you look up from your tea cup and catch Reine's eye. She is smiling at you, and there's nothing behind her smile. Nothing, that is, which tells you she disapproves of what you've done. Quite the reverse in fact. And the things that are behind her smile tell you that there's no need to think about it any more.

"There's something else about Schnabel that you ought to know," you tell Atah. "He had these in his pocket."

You bring out the diamonds that Schnabel had flaunted before you, and throw them onto the mattress. They all crowd round to look at them.

"He had already made a deal with a diamond concern to handle these," you explain. "He planned to get rid of us right from the time before we left Earth. His idea was to go back alone with these and become independent. He said that was his sole interest in space flight."

Atah looks sad. You can understand his feelings.

"I seem to have made a great mistake in choosing him for the trip," Atah says slowly. "Apparently his knowledge was a good deal less than I believed."

You don't get it. What's his knowledge got to do with it? Surely it's his attitude that counts. You say so.

"No, Mike," Atah replies. "I can understand the attitude. It would be a big temptation to walk off with a handful of diamonds. No, it's his lack of knowledge. You see, these aren't diamonds. Oh, they are pretty and might even have some sort of value. But they are definitely not diamonds. And Schnabel should have known that. He should have known that any diamonds on the Moon would be deep down inside the crust anyway. But apart from that, Schnabel should not have been led astray by popular accounts of these things. He ought to have remembered that there's no evidence for the existence of carbon on the Moon. And after all, what are diamonds but tightly compressed carbon?"

"But—but," you say. "They sparkled so beautifully!"

Atah smiled. "Lots of things do. If you still think these may be diamonds, watch."

He lifts one off the bank and throws it across the dome. It hits the wall on the far side and splinters into several pieces. And diamond is the hardest substance known!

"You win," you say. "It would almost have been worth letting Schnabel take these back to Earth and try to claim his fortune. Imagine him devoting his life to space travel—and then this!"

You all laugh, because it's good to laugh. Because you've

all had enough of serious things. Because the Moon is beginning to get everybody down a little bit.

"All right," says Atah. "We couldn't rest while you were out there, Mike, so I think we'll all take a long sleep. Then when we wake up—there's work to be done. We want to leave here in two weeks, at the latest."

"Amem," comes a chorus from you and Clavier and Lenson and Reina. Dear Reina. You don't dream of her when you bunk down. Which is disappointing.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Days Go By

Time goes quickly, you find, when you're working hard. Ten days, Earth days, have passed by since you killed Schnabel. And a lot has happened since then.

The work has been hard and long, so hard and so long that your muscles are permanently aching now and you would rather stoop than stand upright. But it's been a pleasant time. Everyone has worked in harmony with the others. Maybe Schnabel's example stays fresh in the mind, maybe the common desire to get back to Earth has something to do with it. Whatever it is, there are no scenes of temperament, no outbursts of temper or irritability. The work goes well. It's fun when the whole crowd are singing into the radio. Maybe it's not very musical, but it's fun.

In a way you're surprised. Conditions haven't been all that rosy. Setbacks have come often. Hours of work have been wasted because of some unforeseen, unforeseeable event that's tied up with lunar conditions. Yet even Clavier has kept his excitability on the production plane.

Of course, a big factor is that the end is in sight. For some time now, you've all known that short of an act of God, you're going to make the dead-line. The certainty of that came when Clavier found his reservoir. A day of rejoicing, that.

The busy little chemist had studied his book well. He and Leeson had pored over it and argued over it, coming always to Atch Kark for arbitration. Then they had gone out and dug. It hadn't taken them many hours to get a working grip of the mining apparatus. A few experimental borings,

during which poor Lesson nearly ran the point of the drill through his toe, and they were set to get going in earnest.

Atch supplied them with geodesic data that he'd got on his surveys and off they went. The first few drillings didn't come to anything, apparently. Showing that geodesic diagnosis is not entirely infallible. When they'd got down to the theoretical depth they'd packed up and moved on. Gradually, they had got more and more depressed. It seemed as though there were no reservoirs on the Moon at all.

Then they struck—no, not oil. Hydrogen. The drill suddenly went soft and slid down several inches. A strong current shot from the central bore, a current that was quickly shut off while both Clavier and Lesson rushed back to the dome with the great news.

"We have found it!" Clavier cried. "It is there, out among the rocks on the other side of the plain. A—what you call?—a gusher, yes!"

"He's right, too," Lesson had beamed, thrilled like a schoolboy to have accomplished something at last. "There ought to be enough for half a dozen trips to Earth."

"Let's hope there is," Atch had replied. "That'll be fine for the next chaps who come along. Now how about getting it to the ship?"

There had been quite a silence after that. In the rush of joy at finding the gusher, no one'd thought of the difficulty of getting the gas right across the plain and up into the fuel tank. At the beginning it had been hoped that a reservoir would be found much nearer than this one. However, the problem had to be solved.

"We will find a way," Clavier had said confidently. "We have the source, we must find a way! Come, Lesson, let us attack this problem."

And they had both gone off into a huddle in the corner of the dome, while Reina made them some food in reward for their good work.

Where Reina's concerned, you reckon there isn't one of you who isn't pleased that she's up here. True, there are

limits, set automatically on what you can talk about, how you can act and the degree to which you can swear. But these very limitations provide some kind of a link with the cool green grass of Earth, and every other colour that isn't black or white.

With Reina around, none of you feel that you are so very far away from home after all. The mere presence of a higher toned voice helps to create the illusion that this is something in the nature of a stage-set. It's rather like the sudden appearance of a flock of English nurses out in Burma or the Middle East during the war. The sand and grime and jungle took a back seat for a while and were replaced by images of home.

That's the way it was here with Reina. It doesn't even only take you back to the launching site in Ecuador. Each one of you gets visions of his home town and the women walking down the main street with their shopping bags. The whole set-up doesn't seem nearly so remote.

Even Atah Kack is pleased he allowed her to come. For some time, he had considered that there was no place for women on the Moon, or in a spaceship. No doubt he was sincere about it, too. But he's come round now. He's glad Reina's here.

As for your own feelings on the matter—well, they don't really bear comment. You'd been pretty fond of her back at the launching site, but now it was more than that. Having seen her stand up to conditions and disappointments that many men would quail under, you reckon she's got what it takes. You want to marry her, and it's the first time you've ever felt like that.

Reina's certainly given you drive, anyway. Once upon a time that seems so long ago, you were a dithering kind of a person compared to what you are now. You used to go around, writing the odd article or short story and managing to live for a while on the proceeds. You took a series of odd jobs that you knew would never lead anywhere. In

fact, this space flight affair was the first proper job you'd ever had.

Even in the early stages of that, you'd written a few articles and reports. Stuff that could have been done in half the time you took to do it.

But you're not like that now. The Moon and Reina have changed all that. In addition to writing voluminous accounts of everything that happens, putting in every tiny detail in case it should some day be important and the people who want to know are a quarter of a million miles away from where it happened—in addition to all that, you've put in a good few hours with Atah on the ship's air-lock. You've straightened out the door unaided while Atah carried on working at the valves. You've done quite a bit of riveting and you've spent a long time holding things up to the frame while Atah hashed away on the other side.

But you've got a terrific compensation. The air-lock is now in perfect condition. Atah and you tried it out a day or so ago and there wasn't one leak. You had filled the ship with oxygen from the spare bottles and taken your helmets off inside the rocket. It made the return trip seem almost accomplished.

There had been quite a celebration that day, too. A double celebration, because Reina had finally got the pipe-line running from the compressor to the food tank. She got into the spirit of things by letting you all have a double ration of sugar in your tea! But she wouldn't allow alcohol. Leeson was all for it, but Atah agreed with Reina.

"When we get back to Earth, Leeson. I'll take you into a bar and you can drink the place dry. I might do the same myself!"

"Holy mackerel!" Leeson had shouted. "That's worth waiting for." He turned to the rest of you. "Imagine seeing Atah drinking beer!"

"Oh, no, not beer," Atah expostulated in a shocked voice. "Whisky. Nost whisky!"

Then there had been a long night of soothing sleep during

which tired and aching muscles recouped a little—but only a little—of their energy.

A few days later there had been another celebration. This time, it was because Clavier and Lesson had managed the impossible. They'd got a pipe running from the reservoir to the compressor. An hour or two after that and liquid hydrogen was filling up the tank in the ship. It was mainly a question of waiting then. Waiting for the remainder of the six hundred tonnes to form.

It was then that the question of Schnabel's body had cropped up. The day after you'd killed him, you had taken his body away from the dome and hid it in the shade of some rocks. You didn't want to have to look at it every time you came out of the dome. The question now was whether it was to be taken back to Earth.

"Of course, the enquiry people would very much like to have a look at it," Atah said.

"Well, let 'em come up and see it!" Lesson had suggested. "It's here any time they want to. I think it's a sheer waste of fuel and space to take a dead body. Especially the body of a man like Schnabel was."

Clavier puts in a word. "He had no relatives, you know. No one will want to claim his body. Lesson is probably right."

"Of course he's right," Reina had clipped in. "Who'd want a body like that? Besides, think of the state it'll be in by the time we get back. It's all right now in the cold. But it won't be cold in the ship. I say let's leave it and use the extra fuel for navigating."

"Yes, that's a big point," Atah had conceded. "The ship will have to take off at an angle; we can't straighten her up, I'm afraid. The extra fuel would enable us to have a much larger safety margin for changing direction once we're off."

"Look," you'd put in. "It's not as though we're planning to burn the body or hack it to pieces. In that shade,

"It'll keep for ages. It'll always be here if anyone wants it. Let's leave it that way."

And so it had been settled. Schmadel's body was to remain on the Moon, where he had expected to get rich quick. You reckoned there were many parallels in history.

And now you stand and wait for Reina to come and get snow with you. You guess she's doing things to herself inside the dome, combing her hair and things like that. Throughout the whole business she's managed to keep looking attractive. Not smart or glamorous, of course, but easy enough on the eye to make you resent the other men's glances.

The air-lock opens and she comes out. This must be the hundredth or two hundredth time you've both been down the crevice for snow. But you don't mind. It's about the only time you get a chance to be alone together.

The snow deposit is getting pretty low now. There was no time to search for a water reservoir. But there will probably be enough to keep things going until you blast off, which will probably be tomorrow or the day after, depending on what Atch thinks about the chances and whether Leeson, who is now checking his instruments, says the ship is space-worthy.

You take Reina's hand as she comes up, not caring whether the others can see you. They got pretty used to the idea that there's something between you and Reina.

When you get down in the crevice you almost lose your courage. You'd intended to do something that has never been done before. But now it seems such a silly thing. You keep worrying about it all the while you and Reina fill the bags with snow.

She is so intuitive about you now that she notices it. Maybe she found that your hand clasp was not so close as usual or something like that. Anyway, she touches your arm and looks up into your face, illuminated by the suit lamps. The expression in her eyes asks you a question, and gives you an answer at the same time.

Suddenly your courage comes back. You put down the bag of snow and lead Reina a little way away from the deposit. Then you get down on your knees and scrape your finger in the thick Moon-dust on the bottom of the crevice, shining your lamp so that Reina can see what you're doing.

When you've finished, you hear a little gasp from her over the radio. You wonder if you've torn it. Then she drops to her knee beside you and scrapes her finger in the dust. She scrapes just one word: YES. It's all you wanted to know. You take her into your arms and press her tightly.

Then you gather up the snow and return to the dome. You start to wonder how long those words will stay there, undisturbed by wind and weather, possibly undisturbed by the next expedition, they could remain there for eternity. The ultimate question, the ultimate answer to all the world's problems:

WILL YOU MARRY ME? YES.

Atch calls you early the next day and reminds you that this is blast-off day. A surge of excitement runs through you and dispels every vestige of tiredness you felt immediately on waking.

It's the same with the others. You are all up and about with much more speed and enthusiasm than usual. Reina prepares breakfast. And it's a fine breakfast, too. There's no sense in leaving good food behind on the Moon, and you won't be needing any on the trip back to Earth, so she fetches everything out of her larder and if it's at all applicable to breakfast, she uses it anyway.

Then you all make the best of the finest meal you've had since landing. Something that will keep you going until someone presents you with steak and chips on Earth.

After that there are all the preparations. The mattresses have to be taken back to the control room—your job, that. Various other things have to be stowed away. The carbon copy of your reports has to be left in a conspicuous position

inside the dome—just in case something goes wrong on the way back. Atah has to check the clockwork firing device that's going to send the ship off into space again. And Cleaver has to see to the dismantling of his electrolysis apparatus. He's almost crying.

Lessen carries Atah's specimens up to the ship, and then you assemble for the blast-off.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Great Loss

Atah takes a last look round. You look round with him and feel that it's all a bit of a mess. The dome looks neat enough, but the bits of trailer rocket and odd items of equipment make the crater seem a fair-ground after a Bank holiday crowd has pushed off. That can't be helped, though. Things'll look a lot worse when the next expedition gets under way with a bigger dome and one or two tunnels and a launching site.

On the whole, you feel you've all done a pretty good job. You've got to the Moon and you've laid the foundations for the lunar base. The rest is up to others.

"I think that's all," says Atah. "We can climb aboard now."

Climbing the ladder, you look back and see that Atah is setting the clockwork mechanism. Fifteen minutes he said he was allowing you. Then the great roar and off into space. You start feeling nervous again.

Atah runs across the plain and starts to climb the ladder. "Hurry up!" he calls. "Don't admire the scenery."

That's all very well, but this may be the last time you ever look at the Moon. The next few trips probably won't need an observer as a special member. And anyway, you're not too sure you want to come back for quite a while. You're not getting younger and there's an age limit on specimens. No, you reckon this is your last view of a world composed of black and white, and hardness, always hardness. Except the dust, which is soft and silky.

So you send one long raking glance across the Moon's

surface and then turn into the air-lock. Then you go up alongside the fuel tank and into the control room.

Clavier, Leeson and Reina are already there. Already clamping themselves down onto their mattresses. You go across to your own, take off your suit and hang it on the rack. You won't be needing it any more. Then you lie down on the sponginess and clip the clamps over your wrists.

Atah comes in and goes across to Leeson in the pilot's mattress. "Okay?" he asks.

Leeson looks up with a grin. "I guess so, Atah. How long have we got?"

Atah glances at the London Circle chronometer and mentally calculates. "Between eight and ten minutes," he says at last. "Time enough?"

"Oh, sure," Leeson replies. "I can't do anything about it anyway. I just like to know."

So you all lie there, waiting. The chronometer doesn't tick, so you've no idea how fast time is passing. But Atah can see the face of it. He'll call out when time gets near.

Nobody says anything. You reckon everybody has a sense of apprehension. Unconsciously, perhaps, you are all thinking that this isn't a bit like it was on Earth where the launching was a big thing, attended by all sorts of experts, subject to all sorts of last minute checks. On the face of it, it seems all right. But you never can tell.

"Two minutes," says Atah.

Automatically, you try to settle yourself more comfortably. It's like being in a dentist's waiting room. You know the kind of thing that's going to happen. You hate it, but you've got to go through with it. Memories from past experience of the same thing come crowding in and you relive the agony of the past—all to no purpose at all.

"One minute."

There's that mad desire to undo the clamps and rush away from it. You know it's too late, that you can't do anything about it, but still you want to try.

"Thirty seconds."

Your mouth is dry and your eyes seem to be right out of their sockets. You glance across at Reina and see that she has her eyes closed. You decide to do the same.

"Ten seconds. Eight. Seven. Five. Three. Two. Zero."

For one terrible moment, you think the thing has failed, that there won't be an explosion, that the ship won't rise. Even as you think it, you realise what a queer thing the human mind is. A moment ago you didn't want it to happen, now it would be catastrophic if it didn't.

But it does. There's the same old roar, the same giant hand smashing down into your face, the foot on your chest making it difficult for you to breathe.

And then the air is filled with lights. Maybe it's because you've been working hard and got weak. Perhaps you haven't been having enough of the right things to eat. Whatever it is, you feel consciousness slipping from you, and the control room becomes quite black.

In a way it's quite a relief.

It's laughter that greets your return to consciousness. Reina's laughter. For a second, you wonder if she's hysterical, but then you see that it isn't that.

She is sitting up above your mattress looking down at you and laughing. "You look so funny with your mouth open," she says.

Abruptly it pulls you back to full consciousness as nothing else could, and you close your mouth sharply. In a moment you open the claps and sit up—and the movement carries you off the mattress. You wonder if you'll never get used to free-fall conditions.

But in a way it's a good thing, for you sail up towards Reina and collide with her.

"All right, you two," says Lenson with a grin. "Cut out the capers. We're going to change direction."

It's then that you realise this is a serious business. The ship must have reached escape velocity while you slept and

then gone into free-fall while you wake up. You can see that Atah has been working at the course.

"A five second burst on number three jet ought to do it," he says.

"Five seconds!" Lesson exclaims. "D'you really mean that?"

"'Fraid so. We came up at a terrific angle you know. We're many thousands of miles out now."

"Well, with a five second burst, all I can say is that it's just as well we left Schnabel back there," Lesson says.

"You're telling me," Atah returns. "I'm damned glad you people talked me into it. I don't think we'd have got back otherwise."

"All right, then. Back in your mattresses, you folks. This won't hurt, but we'd better not take chances."

So you all do that. Except Clavier. He hasn't even got up. He's still lying there with his eyes closed peacefully. You reckon he just can't be bothered to do anything until the ship lands. He's been working hard enough for ten men.

Lesson gives one look round to see that you're all clamped down and then reaches out for the fire control buttons. Looking along the top of your nose, you can see him depress one, his eyes on the chronometer. A jerk pushes you down into the mattress, but it's a very gentle one. Then you see Lesson's finger come away and you know it's all over.

Immediately, Atah starts to work on his calculations again. Within a few minutes he looks up and hears. "We should come down within five miles of where we started from," he says.

"That'll be slap in the middle of a sandy plain, then," Reina laughs. "Just like home."

You get out of your clamps and gingerly swing your legs round so that you at least have the semblance of sitting, even though you are several inches above the mattress. You feel better that way.

Looking round the room, you see that Clavier still hasn't got up. Hasn't even undone the clamps on his wrists. Then

you see the colour of his face and your stomach gets tighter than it's ever been. You swallow hard and push yourself gently off the mattress towards Clavier's. Reina tries to come, too, but you motion her away.

"Stay where you are for a moment," you say to her. "Just stay where you are."

Hovering over Clavier, you can see that it's true. The acceleration was too much for his heart. Clavier won't be doing any more electrolysis, on the Moon or anywhere else.

"Atah," you say. "Atah, look."

He puts down his slide rule and floats over. There is deep concern on his face as he reaches out a hand and feels for Clavier's pulse. Then he turns away quickly and goes back to his slide rule. He sits with his back to the room, staring at the rule. But his shoulders quiver.

Leesen, who has fixed things up, is looking straight at his instrument panel, his jaw set hard—just in case.

Reina is unashamedly crying. You go across to her and slip an arm round her shoulder.

"He was a great guy," Leesen says. "I'm glad I came with him."

"Yes," you say. "Yes. I guess we all feel like that. He did so much—worked so hard—was such a cheery guy, Him and his apparatus." Suddenly you swing round to Atah, who's back is still turned to you. "Atah," you say. "Atah, they mustn't take it down, his electrolysis gear. It must stay there. Always."

Atah turns tired shoulders to you. His face is lined with the responsibilities he's been bearing for years and the great burden he's been bearing these last few weeks.

"It will," he says. "It will stay there."

The horrible thing about it is there's nothing to cover Clavier's body with. There's no use for sheets so you didn't carry them on the ship. And it doesn't seem right to drape a spacesuit over him. Yet it doesn't seem right to leave him like that.

But life has to go on. The ship still has to be piloted. Calculation still has to be made so that the ship won't wander off course. And Reina has to be cheered up. Sorrowing won't do anybody any good. Least of all Clavier.

So you sit with Reina and talk about the future of the Moon. Atah and Leeson catch on too and interpolate odd remarks to keep things going.

"The next generation will think this was a pretty clumsy business," you say. And Reina knows who you mean by the next generation. "They'll think we took a heck of a long time about doing very little. I can imagine that the first men on Mars will have a much easier time of it, using our experience."

"They will too," says Leeson. "But they won't have the distinction we've got. We're the first men to enter space!"

"And I'm the first woman," says Reina proudly. "I'll never forget you for letting me come, Atah."

"That's nice," he replies.

It's pretty hard to keep talking when you're all so tired. In fact, you very nearly fall asleep while somebody's talking. Then, after a while, you do fall asleep. With your arm around Reina.

Leeson's voice calls you back to consciousness. "Back to your mattresses all of you. We're landing!"

Oh, God, you think. That again!

But it's not so bad as it might be. And there's plenty of fuel so there's no risk being run. You just lie back on the mattress and imagine what's going to happen down below.

One thing that's pretty certain is that you won't like the reception. No hands and flags for you.

You reckon you must be about the only man who's proposed to a girl without kissing her first. And she's probably the first girl to marry a man under the same conditions. All in all, you're a pretty unique pair!

The deceleration starts to grab at you, but you don't mind.

It doesn't matter any more. Maybe you're being selfish, but nothing seems to matter any more. The world is a great place, whether by that you mean Earth or Moon. Great places, both of them.

And then the force drops away. The ship hunches a little and then stays motionless.

"Well," says Atah. "We seem to have made it. Let's go and see what they think of the men in the Moon."

THE END

*All characters in this story are fictitious and imaginary
and bear no relation to any living person.*

our book review

We just have to devote the whole of this space to a notice of only one book. For it is a work of tremendous importance for everyone who has ever read a word of science fiction, and cannot be too strongly recommended to all with the slightest interest in space travel.

THE EXPLORATION OF SPACE is a new non-fiction work from the pen of Arthur C. Clarke, B.Sc., F.R.S., Chairman of the British Interplanetary Society. It is a kind of extension of his earlier **INTERPLANETARY FLIGHT** and is put out by the same publisher—Temple Press, Bowling Green Lane, London, E.C.1, at 32/6.

There are 194 pages, fourteen plates (four in full colour) and a host of clear, fully-explanatory drawings in the text. The book is entirely non-technical and can be understood by any intelligent layman, whether he already knows anything of the subject or not.

Eighteen chapters in lucid language, dotted with Clarke's own brand of humour, deal

with every aspect of extra-terrestrial exploration. And we even enjoy.

The book starts with the shaping of the Deurne, the ideas that have come down to us from the past. It covers the rocket in a way that makes this vehicle understandable to anyone. It then goes on to deal fully and completely with escape from Earth, life in space, navigation, the Lunar and Martian bases, the inner and outer planets, space stations, other men than ours, and even has a chapter on jaunts to the stars.

There is a full, but simple, discussion of all the problems involved in space exploration—medical, engineering, political and legal. And there is a fine résumé of the effect that the conquest of space will have on mankind.

Through it all, you can be sure that every fact presented is accurate, and that every opinion—clearly labelled as such—is based on the author's extensive experience in this field of human enquiry.

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